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KEEPING THE HEART,

OR,

THE SAINT INDEED.

BY REV. JOHN FLAVEL.

WRITTEN A. D. 1667.

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EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

TO MY DEARLY BELOVED AND LONGED FOR, THE FLOCK OF JESUS CHRIST IN DARTMOUTH, OVER WHOM THE HOLY GHOST HATH MADE ME AN OVERSEER, SOUND JUDGMENT, TRUE ZEAL, AND UNSTAINED PURITY ARE HEARTILY WISHED.

MY DEAR FRIENDS—There are three sad sights with which our eyes should continually affect our hearts.

The first is, To behold, in every place, so many profane and dissolute persons who bear the very image of Satan; the face of whose conversation plainly discovers what they are, and whither they are going, Phil. 3:18, 19; these look like themselves, the children of wrath.

The second is, To see so many accursed hypocrites artificially disguising themselves, and with marvellous dexterity acting the part of saints, so that even a judicious eye may sometimes mistake the similar workings of the Spirit on them, for his saving workings on others. To hear such a person conversing, praying, bewailing his corruptions, and talking of his experiences, would easily persuade a man to believe that he hath the heart as well as

the face of a sincere Christian. So the people of God do speak, so they pray, and even so they relate their experiences. These look like saints, but are none.

The third is, To see so many real saints in whom the Spirit of truth is, who yet, through the impetuous workings of their corruptions, and neglecting to watch over their hearts, do often fall into such scandalous practices, that they look like hypocrites, though they are not so.

These are three sad sights indeed ; and “ O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep abundantly over them all !”

For the first I would mourn heartily, considering that they, so continuing, must be damned eternally. 2 Thess. 1 : 8, 9 ; 1 Cor. 6 : 9.

For the second I would both weep and tremble, considering that they, so abiding, must be damned doubly. Matt. 24 : 51.

And for the third, no less than any of the rest, because, though they themselves may and shall be saved, yet their example makes fast the bonds of death upon both the former. Matt. 18 : 7 ; 2 Samuel, 12 : 13, 14. Alas, that they should shed the blood of other souls, for whom Christ shed his own blood ; that they should be cruel to others, who have found Christ so kind to them. I know they dare not do it directly and intentionally, but so it proves occasionally and eventually. Suffer me here

to digress a little, and expostulate with these prejudiced and hardened souls: I will presently return to you again.

O why do you injure your own souls by other men's example? Because they stumble and bruise themselves, will you fall and break your necks? I desire that all such as harden themselves by these things, and take up a good opinion of their own deplorable condition, would soberly consider and answer these three inquiries.

1. Doth religion any way countenance or patronize the sinful practices of its professors; or doth it not rather impartially and severely condemn them? It is the glory of the Christian religion that it is "pure and undefiled;" no doctrine so holy, nor doth any make more provision for a holy life. Tit. 2: 11, 12. There is indeed a case wherein we may charge the evil practices of men upon their principles; but that is when their practices naturally flow from, and necessarily follow their principles. As, for example, if I see Papists sin boldly, I may charge it upon their principles; for they set pardons to sale, and so make way for loose conduct. If I see a moralist slight the grace of God, and proudly advance himself, I may charge it upon his principles, which directly lead to it. But can I do so where such practices are condemned and provided against by the avowed principles of those who commit them?

2. Is it not a most irrational thing to attack religion because of the scandalous ways of some, while, in the meantime, you wholly slight and overlook the holy and heavenly conversation of many others? Are all that profess godliness loose and careless in their lives? No; some are an ornament to their profession, and the glory of Christ. And why must the innocent be condemned with the guilty? Why the eleven for one Judas?

3. If you condemn religion because of the scandalous lives of some that profess it, must you not then cast off all religion in the world, and turn downright atheists? Surely this is the consequence of it; for what religion is there, but some that profess it walk contrary to their profession? and then, as Constantine told the Novatian, you must set up your ladder, and go to heaven by yourself.

But, alas, it is not our printed apologies for religion, but the visible reformation of its professors, that must both preserve its honor, and remove those fatal stumbling-blocks, at which the blind world strikes and falls into eternal perdition.

Now there are two ways by which this may be effected. By convincing the conscience of professors of their miscarriages, and the evil aggravations of them; and by medicating the heart, and cleansing the fountain whence they proceed. In the first of these, a worthy and eminent servant of Christ hath lately labored, holding a clear "gospel-glass" before

the faces of professors, which truly represents their spots and blemishes. If he that reads it will consider, apply, and practise, it shall doubtless turn to his salvation; but if it turn to no good account to him that reads it, I know it shall turn to a testimony for him that wrote it. The second is a principal design of this small treatise, the subject of which is exceedingly weighty, and of daily use to the people of God, though the manner of handling it be attended with many defects and weaknesses: every one cannot be excellent who yet may be useful.

I will exercise your patience no longer than while I tell you why I publish it to the view of the world; and why I direct it particularly to you.

For the publication of it, take this sincere and brief account—that as I was led to this subject by a special providence, so I was led to the publication of it by a kind of necessity. The providence at first leading me to it was this: A dear and choice friend of my intimate acquaintance, being under much inward trouble on account of some special heart disorder, opened the case to me, and earnestly requested some rules and helps in that particular. While I was bending my thoughts to that special case, divers other cases of equal importance, some of which were dependent upon that consideration, occurred to my thoughts; and this scripture which I have insisted upon, presented itself as a fit foun-

dation for the whole discourse ; which, being lengthened out to what you see, various friends requested me to transcribe for their use several of the cases here handled, and some others begged me to publish the whole, to which I was in a manner necessitated, to save the pains of transcribing, which, to me, is a very tedious and tiresome work ; and just as I had almost finished the copy, an opportunity presented to make it public. So that, from first to last, I have been carried beyond my intentions in this thing.

If any say, the world is even cloyed with books, and therefore, though the discourse be necessary, yet the publication is needless ; I answer, there are multitudes of books indeed, and many which concern not essential truths and practical godliness, but spend their strength upon impracticable notions and frivolous controversies ; many also strike at essential truths, and endeavor to undermine the power of godliness ; and some there are that nourish the root, and tend to clear and confirm, to prepare and apply the great truths of the gospel, that they may be bread for souls to live and feed on. Now, though I could wish that those who have handled the pen of the scribe, had better employed their time and pains than to obtrude useless discourses upon the world ; yet, for books of the latter rank, I say, that when husbandmen complain of too much corn, let Christians complain of too many such books. Or,

if you be so highly conceited of your own knowledge and ability, that such books are needless to you ; if you let them alone they will do you no hurt, and other poor hungry souls will be glad of them, and bless God for what you despise and leave.

If it be said that several of the cases here handled touch not your condition, I answer, That which is not your condition, may be another's. If you be placed in an easy, full, and prosperous state, and so have no need of the helps here offered to support your hearts under pinching wants, others are forced to live by faith for every day's provision. If you be dandled upon the knee of providence, some of your brethren are under its feet. If you have inward peace and tranquillity of spirit, and so need not the counsels here given to ward off those desperate conclusions that poor afflicted souls are ready to draw upon themselves at such a time ; yet it may be a word in season to them, and they may say as David to Abigail, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, and blessed be thy advice."

Again, that may be your condition shortly, which is not your condition at present. Say not thy mountain stands strong, thou shalt never be moved : there are changes in the right hand of the Most High, and then those truths which are little more esteemed than hedge-fruits, will be as apples of gold in pictures of silver. See Jer. 33 : 10, 11. The prophet there teaches the Jews—who then dwelt in their

own houses—how to defend their religion when in Babylon, and what they should say to the Chaldeans there, and therefore that verse is written in Chaldee.

As for the dedication of this treatise to you, I was induced thereto by the consideration of the relation I have to you above all the people in the world. I look upon my gifts as yours, my time as yours, and all the talents I am intrusted with as yours. It is not with you as with a woman whose husband is dead, and so she is freed from the law of her husband: the relation still continues, and so do all the mutual duties of it.*

Another consideration was my necessary absence from you. I would not that personal absence should by insensible degrees untwist, as usually it doth, the cord of friendship; and therefore I have endeavored, as absent friends are wont to do, to preserve and strengthen it by this small remembrance. It was Vespasian's answer to Apollonius, when he desired access for two philosophers, "My doors are always open to philosophers, but my very breast is open to thee." I cannot say with him, my doors are open for the free access of friends, they being

* This treatise was written when the author was separated from his people by the oppressive Act of Uniformity and kindred enactments, under which about two thousand faithful ministers and their congregations endured bitter persecution for conscience' sake.

by a sad providence shut against myself: but this I can say, my very breast is still open to you; you are as dear to me as ever.

Another inducement—and indeed the main—was the perpetual usefulness and necessity of these truths for you, of which you will have continual need: and I know few of you have such happy memories as to retain all, and I cannot be always with you to inculcate these things; but I was willing to leave this with you as a legacy, as a testimony of sincere love for and care over you. This may counsel and direct you when I cannot. I may be rendered useless to you by a civil or natural death; but this will outlive me—and O that it may serve your souls when I am silent in the dust.

To hasten now to a conclusion, I have only these three requests to you, which I earnestly beseech you not to deny me; yea, I charge you, as ever you hope to appear with comfort before the great Shepherd, do not dare to slight these requests.

1. Above all other studies in the world, study your own hearts; waste not a minute more of your precious time about frivolous and unsubstantial controversies. It is reported even of Bellarmine—how truly I examine not—that he turned with loathing from the study of school-divinity, because it wanted the sweet juice of piety. I had rather it should be said of you, as one said of Swinkfeldius, “He wanted

a regular head, but not an honest heart," than that you should have regular heads and irregular hearts. My dear flock, I have, according to the grace given me, labored in the course of my ministry among you, to feed you with the heart-strengthening bread of practical doctrine, and I do assure you, it is far better you should have the sweet and saving impressions of gospel truths, feelingly and powerfully conveyed to your hearts, than only to understand them by a bare ratiocination, or a dry syllogistical inference. Leave trifling studies to such as have time lying on their hands, and know not how to employ it. Remember you are at the door of eternity and have other work to do. Those hours you spend upon heart-work in your closets, are the golden spots of all your time, and will have the sweetest influence up to your last hour. Never forget those sermons I preached to you upon that subject, from 2 Kings, 20 : 2, 3. Heart-work is weighty and difficult work ; an error there may cost you your souls. I may say of it, as Augustine speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity, "A man can err in nothing more easily or more dangerously." O, then, study your hearts.

2. My next request is, that you will carefully look to your conversation, and be accurate in all your ways : hold forth the word of life. Be sure, by the strictness and holiness of your lives, to settle yourselves in the very consciences of your enemies.

Remember that your lives must be produced in the great day, to judge the world. 1 Cor. 6 : 2. O then, what manner of persons ought you to be ! You have many eyes over you—the omniscient eye of God, that searches the heart and reins, Rev. 2 : 23 ; the vigilant eye of Satan, Job 1 : 7, 8 ; the envious eye of enemies, that curiously observe you, Psalm 5 : 8 ; the quick and observant eye of conscience, which none of your actions escape. Rom. 9 : 1.

O then be watchful and accurate in all manner of conversation : keep up the power of godliness in your closets and families, and then you will not let it fall in your more public employments and converse in the world. I have often told you that it is the honor of the gospel, that it makes the best parents and children, the best masters and servants, the best husbands and wives in the world.

3. My third and last request is, that you pray for me. I hope I can say, and I am sure some of you have acknowledged, that I came at first among you as the return and answer of your prayers ; and indeed so it should be. See Luke 10 : 2. I am persuaded, also, I have been carried on in my work by your prayers ; it is sweet when it is so. See Ephes. 6 : 18, 19. And I hope by your prayers to receive yet a further benefit, even that which is mentioned, Heb. 13 : 18, 19 ; Philem. 22. And truly it is but just you should pray for me, I have often prayed for you ; let the pulpit, family, and closet witness for

me : and God forbid I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.

Yea, friends, your own interest may persuade to it : what mercies you obtain for me, redound to your own advantage : if God preserve me, it is for your use and service : the more gifts and graces a minister hath, the better for them that shall wait on his ministry ; the more God gives unto me, the more I shall be able to give out to you. I will detain you no longer, but entreat you to accept this small testimony of my great love, and have recourse to it as the exigencies of your condition shall require. Read it consideringly and obediently : judge it not by the dress and style, but by the weight and savor of what you read. It is a good rule of Bernard, in reading books, " Regard not so much the science, as the savor." That it may prove the savor of life unto life to you, and all those into whose hands it shall come, is the hearty desire of,

Your loving and faithful pastor,

JOHN FLAVEL.

From my Study at Ley, in }
Slapton, Oct. 7, 1667. }

KEEPING THE HEART.

INTRODUCTION.

“KEEP THY HEART WITH ALL DILIGENCE; FOR OUT OF IT ARE THE ISSUES OF LIFE.”—PROV. 4:23.

THE heart of man is his worst part before it is regenerated, and the best afterwards: it is the seat of principles, and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty in conversion, is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion, is to keep the heart with God. Here lies the very difficulty and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate to heaven a strait gate. Direction and help in this great work, are the scope and sum of this text; wherein we have an exhortation, “Keep thy heart with all diligence,” and the reason or motive enforcing it, “For out of it are the issues of life.”

1. In the *exhortation* I shall consider the matter of the duty, and the manner of performing it.

The *matter* of the duty, "Keep thy heart." Heart is not here taken properly for that noble part of the body which philosophers call the first that lives, and the last that dies ; but by heart, in a metaphor, the Scripture sometimes understands some particular noble faculty of the soul. In Rom. 1 : 21, it is put for the understanding : "Their foolish heart," that is, their foolish understanding, "was darkened." In Psa. 119 : 11, it is put for the memory : "Thy word have I hid in my heart." And in 1 John, 3 : 21, it is put for the conscience, which hath in it both the light of the understanding and the recognitions of the memory : "If our heart condemn us ;" that is, if our conscience, whose proper office it is to condemn. But in our text we are to take it more generally for the whole soul, or inner man ; for what the heart is to the body, that the soul is to the man ; and what health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul. The state of the whole body depends upon the soundness and vigor of the heart, and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

By "keeping the heart," understand the diligent and constant use and improvement of all holy means and duties, to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God.* La-

* I say constant, for the reason added in the text extends the duty to all the states and conditions of a Christian life, and makes it bind always : if the heart must be kept because

vater, on this text, will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, begirt by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within ; in which danger, the soldiers upon pain of death are commanded to watch ; and though the expression, "keep thy heart," seems to put it upon us as our work, yet it doth not imply a sufficiency or ability in us to do it. We are as able to stop the sun in its course, or make the rivers run backward, as by our own skill and power to rule and order our hearts ; we may as well be our own saviors, as our own keepers ; and yet Solomon speaks properly enough, when he saith, "Keep thy heart," because the duty is ours, though the power be God's. A natural man hath no spiritual power ; a gracious man hath some, though not sufficient ; and the power he hath depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ. Grace within us, is beholden to grace without us. "Without me ye can do nothing." So much of the matter of the duty.

The *manner* of performing it is, "with all diligence." The Hebrew is very emphatic : "Keep with all keeping," or "keep, keep ; set double guards : your hearts will be gone else." And this vehemency of expression with which the duty is urged, plainly implies how difficult it is to keep our hearts, and how dangerous to let them go.

"out of it are the issues of life," then as long as these issues of life do flow out of it, we are obliged to keep it.

2. The *reason or motive* quickening to this duty is very forcible and weighty: "For out of it are the issues of life;" that is, it is the source and fountain of all vital actions and operations. Saith Jerome, "It is the spring and original of both good and evil, as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion." The heart is the treasury, the hand and tongue but the shops; what is in these comes from thence; the hand and tongue always begin where the heart ends. The heart contrives, and the members execute. "A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." So then, if the heart err in its work, these must needs miscarry in theirs; for heart-errors are like original errors, which cannot be rectified afterwards; or like the misplacing and inverting of type in the press, which must needs cause so many errata in all the copies that are printed off. O then, how important a duty is that which is contained in the following proposition:

DOCTRINE—*The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition, is the great business of a Christian's life.*

What the philosopher saith of waters, is as properly applicable to hearts; it is hard to keep them within any bounds. God hath set bounds and lim-

its to them, yet how frequently do they transgress not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty : this is that which affords the Christian matter of labor, fear, and trembling, to his dying day. It is not the cleansing of the hand that makes a Christian, for many a hypocrite can show as fair a hand as he ; but the purifying, watching, and right ordering of the heart : this is the thing that provokes so many sad complaints, and costs so many deep groans and brinish tears. It was the pride of Hezekiah's heart that made him lie in the dust, mourning before the Lord. 2 Chron. 32 : 26. It was the fear of hypocrisy invading the heart, that made David cry, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed." It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart in the service of God, that made him pour out the prayer, "Unite my heart to fear thy name."

The method in which I shall improve the doctrine is this :

First, I shall inquire what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

Secondly, assign divers reasons why Christians must make this the great work and business of their lives.

Thirdly, point out those special seasons which especially call for this diligence in keeping the heart.

Fourthly, apply the whole.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUTY EXPLAINED.

To keep the heart, necessarily supposes a previous work of regeneration, which hath set the heart right by giving it a new spiritual bent and inclination ; for as long as the heart is not set right by grace as to its habitual frame, no duties or means can keep it right with God. Self is the poise of the unrenewed heart, which biases and moves it in all its designs and actions ; and as long as it is so, it is impossible that any external means should keep it with God.

Man, by creation, was of one constant, uniform frame, and tenor of spirit ; held one straight and even course ; not one thought or faculty was disordered ; his mind had a perfect illumination to understand and know the will of God ; his will a perfect compliance therewith ; his sensitive appetite, and other inferior powers, stood in a most obedient subordination.

Man, by the apostasy, is become a most disordered and rebellious creature, contesting with and opposing his Maker, as the first cause, by self-dependence ; as the chiefest good, by self-love ; as the highest Lord, by self-will ; and as the last end, by self-seeking—and so is quite disordered, and all his acts irregular : his illuminated understanding is clouded

with ignorance ; his complying will is full of rebellion and stubbornness ; his subordinate powers cast off the dominion and government of the superior faculties.

But by regeneration this disordered soul is set right again, sanctification being the rectifying and due framing, or as the scripture phrases it, the renovation of the soul “after the image of God;” in which self-dependence is removed by faith, self-love by the love of God, self-will by subjection and obedience to the will of God, and self-seeking by self-denial. The darkened understanding is illuminated, Eph. 1 : 18 ; the refractory will sweetly subdued, Psalm 110 : 3 ; the rebellious appetite, or concupiscence, gradually conquered. Rom. 6 : 7–23. And thus the soul, which sin had universally depraved, is again by grace restored and rectified.

This being presupposed, it will not be difficult to comprehend what it is to keep the heart, which is nothing else but *the constant care and diligence of such a renewed man, to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace hath brought it, and daily strives to hold it.*

For though grace hath, in a great measure, rectified the soul, and given it an habitual heavenly temper, yet sin often actually discomposes it again ; so that even a gracious heart is like a musical instrument ; which, though it be ever so exactly tuned, a small matter brings it out of tune again ;

yea, hang it aside but a little, and it will need setting again, before you can play another lesson on it: even so stands the case with gracious hearts; if they are in frame in one duty, yet how dull, dead, and disordered when they come to another; and therefore every duty needs a particular preparation of the heart: "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands towards him." To keep the heart, then, is carefully to preserve it from sin which disorders it, and to maintain that spiritual and gracious frame which fits it for a life of communion with God; and this includes these six acts in it:

1. *Frequent observation* of the frame of the heart, turning in and examining how the case stands with it: this is one part of the work. Carnal and formal persons take no heed to this, they cannot be brought to confer with their own hearts: there are some who have lived forty or fifty years in the world, and have scarce had one hour's discourse with their own hearts all that while. It is a hard thing to bring a man and himself together upon such a business concern; but saints know those soliloquies and self-conferences to be of excellent use and advantage. The heathen could say, "The soul is made wise by sitting still in quietness." Though bankrupts care not to look into their books of accounts, yet upright hearts will know whether they go backward or forward. "I commune with mine own heart." The

heart can never be kept until its case be examined and understood.

2. It includes *deep humiliation* for heart evils and disorders. Thus Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart. 2 Chron. 32:26. Thus the people were ordered to spread forth their hands to God in prayer, in a sense of the plague of their own hearts. 1 Kings, 8:38. Upon this account many an upright heart hath been laid low before God: O what a heart have I! They have in their confessions pointed at the heart, the pained place: Lord, here is the wound, here is the plague-sore. It is with the heart well kept, as it is with the eye, which is a fit emblem of it: if a small dust get into the eye, it will never leave twinkling and weeping till it have wept it out; so the upright heart cannot be at rest till it have wept out its troubles, and poured out its complaints before the Lord.

3. It includes *earnest supplications* and instant prayer for heart-purifying and rectifying grace, when sin hath defiled and disordered it. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "Unite my heart to fear thy name." Saints have always many such petitions depending before the throne of God's grace: this is the thing which is most pleaded by them with God. When they are praying for outward mercies, haply their spirits may be more remiss; but when it comes to the heart-case, then they extend their spirits to the utmost, fill their mouths with argu-

ments, weep, and make supplication : “ O for a better heart ! O for a heart to love God more, to hate sin more, to walk more evenly with God ! Lord, deny not to me such a heart, whatever thou deny me : give me a heart to fear thee, love and delight in thee, if I beg my bread in desolate places.” It is observed of holy Mr. Bradford, that when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had felt some brokenness of heart for that sin ; and when praying for any spiritual mercy, would never give over that suit, until he had got some relish of that mercy.

4. It includes the imposing of *strong engagements* and bonds upon ourselves to walk more carefully with God, and avoid the occasions whereby the heart may be induced to sin. Well-composed, advised ; and deliberate vows are, in some cases, of excellent use to guard the heart against some special sin : “ I made a covenant with mine eyes.” By this means, holy men have overawed their souls, and preserved themselves from defilement by some special heart-corruptions.

5. It includes a *constant holy jealousy* over our own hearts. Quick-sighted self-jealousy is an excellent preservative from sin. He that will keep his heart, must have the eyes of his soul awake and open upon all the disorderly and tumultuous stirrings of his affections : if the affections break loose, and the passions be stirred, the soul must discover

and suppress them before they get to a height. O my soul, doest thou well in this? My tumultuous thoughts and passions, where is your commission? Happy is the man that thus feareth always. By this fear of the Lord it is that men depart from evil, shake off security, and preserve themselves from iniquity. He that will keep his heart, must eat and drink with fear, rejoice with fear, and pass the whole time of his sojourning here in fear; and all little enough to keep the heart from sin.

6. It includes the *realizing of God's presence* with us, and setting the Lord always before us. This the people of God have found an excellent means to keep their hearts upright, and awe them from sin. When the eye of our faith is fixed upon the eye of God's omniscience, we dare not let out our thoughts and affections to vanity. Holy Job durst not suffer his heart to yield to an impure, vain thought; and what was it that moved him to so great a circumspection? Why, he tells you, "Doth not He see my ways, and count all my steps?" "Walk before me," saith God to Abraham, "and be thou perfect." Even as parents set their children in the congregation before them, knowing that else they will be playing, so would the heart of the best man wander, were it not for the eye of God.

In these, and such like particulars, do gracious souls express the care they have of their hearts. They are as careful to prevent the breaking loose

of their corruptions in times of temptation, as seamen are to bind fast the guns, that they break not loose in a storm ; as careful to preserve the sweetness and comfort they have from God in any duty, as one that comes out of a hot bath, or great sweat, is of taking cold by going forth into the chill air. This is the work ; and of all works in religion, it is the most difficult, constant, and important work.

It is the *hardest* work : heart-work is hard work indeed. To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit, will cost no great pains ; but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon him, this will cost thee something. To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy ; but to get thy heart broken for sin while thou art confessing it, melted with free-grace while thou art blessing God for it ; to be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to keep thy heart in this frame, not only in, but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and travailing pains of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external part of thy life in a laudable and comely manner, is no great matter ; even carnal persons, by the force of common principles, can do this : but to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up a holy government over thy thoughts, to have

all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is not easy.

It is a *constant* work : the keeping of the heart is such a work as is never done till life be done ; this labor and our life end together. It is with a Christian in this business, as it is with seamen that have sprung a leak at sea ; if they tug not constantly at the pump, the water increases upon them, and will quickly sink them ; it is in vain for them to say, The work is hard and we are weary. There is no time or condition in the life of a Christian, which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in the keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in the keeping up of Moses' hands, while Israel and Amalek were fighting below. Exod. 17 : 12. No sooner do Moses' hands grow heavy and sink down, but Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch over their own hearts but a few minutes.

It is the *most important* business of a Christian's life. Without this we are but formalists in religion ; all our professions, gifts, and duties signify nothing : " My son, give me thine heart." God is pleased to call that a gift, which is indeed a debt : he will put this honor upon the creature, to receive it from him in the way of a gift ; but if this be not given him, he regards not whatever else you bring to him : there is so much only of worth and value in what we do, as there is of heart in it. Concern-

ing the heart, God seems to say as Joseph of Benjamin, "If you bring not Benjamin with you, you shall not see my face." Among the heathen, when the beast was cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart; and if that was unsound and naught, the sacrifice was rejected. God rejects all duties—how glorious soever in other respects—offered him without a heart. He that performs duty without a heart, that is, heedlessly, is no more accepted with God, than he that performs it with a double heart, that is, hypocritically. Isa. 66 : 3. Thus I have briefly opened the nature of the duty, what is imported in this phrase, "Keep thy heart."

CHAPTER II.

REASONS FOR THE DUTY.

I SHALL next give you *some rational account why Christians should make it the great business of their lives to keep their hearts.*

The importance and necessity of making this our great and main business will manifestly appear, in that the honor of God, the sincerity of our profession, the beauty of our conversation, the comfort of our souls, the improvement of our graces, and our stability in the hour of temptation, are all wrapt up in and dependent on our sincerity and care in the management of this work.

1. *The glory of God* is much concerned therein. Heart-evils are very provoking to the Lord. The schools do well observe, that outward sins are sins of great infamy, but heart-sins are sins of deeper guilt. How severely has the great God declared his wrath from heaven against heart-wickedness! The great crime for which the old world stands indicted, is heart-wickedness: "God saw that every imagination of the heart was only evil continually;" for which he sent the most dreadful judgment that was ever executed since the world began: "And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created, from the face of the earth, both man and

beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air ; for it repenteth me that I have made them.” We find not their murders, adulteries, blasphemies—though they were defiled with these—particularly alleged against them ; but the evils of their hearts. Yea, that which God was so provoked by as to give up his peculiar inheritance into the enemies’ hand, was the evil of their hearts : “ O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved : how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee ?” Jer. 4 : 14. Of the wickedness and vanity of their thoughts, God took special notice ; and because of this, the Chaldean must come upon them as a “ lion from his thicket, and tear them to pieces.” For the very sin of thoughts it was that God threw down the fallen angels from heaven, and keeps them still in everlasting chains to the judgment to which they are reserved ; as prisoners that have most irons laid upon them, may be supposed to be the greatest malefactors. And what was their sin but spiritual wickedness ? for they, having no bodily organs, could act nothing externally against God. Yea, mere heart-evils are so provoking to God, that for them he rejects with indignation all the duties that some men perform unto him : “ He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man ; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck ; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood ; he that burneth incense, as

if he blessed an idol." Isa. 66 : 3. In what words could abhorrence of a creature's actions be more fully expressed by the holy God? Murder and idolatry are not more vile in his account than their sacrifices, though in form such as himself appointed. And what made them so? The following words inform us: "Their soul delighteth in their abominations."

Such is the vileness of heart-sins, that the Scriptures sometimes intimate the difficulty of pardon for them. So in the case of Simon Magus. Acts 8 : 22. His heart was not right, he had vile thoughts of God, and the things of God: the apostle bids him repent and pray, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him. O then, never slight heart-evils; for by these God is highly wronged and provoked: and for this reason, let every Christian make it his work to keep his heart with all diligence.

2. *The sincerity of our profession* depends much upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts; for it is most certain, that a man is but a hypocrite in his profession, how exact soever he be in the externals of religion, that is heedless and careless of the frame of his heart. You have a striking instance of this in the case of Jehu, 2 Kings, 10 : 31 : "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart." That context gives us an account of the great service performed by Jehu against the house

of Ahab and Baal, as also of a great temporal reward given him by God for that service, even that his children to the fourth generation should sit upon the throne of Israel. And yet in these words Jehu is censured as a hypocrite: though God approved and rewarded the work, yet he abhorred and rejected the person that did it as hypocritical. And wherein lay his hypocrisy, but in this—that he “took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord with all his heart?” that is, he did all insincerely and for self-ends: and though the work he did was outwardly good, yet he, not purging his heart from those unworthy self-designs in doing it, was a hypocrite. And though Simon, of whom we spoke before, appeared such a person that the apostle could not regularly refuse him, yet his hypocrisy was quickly discovered: and what discovered it but this, that though he professed and associated himself with the saints, yet he was a stranger to the mortification of heart-sins? “Thy heart is not right with God.” It is true there is a great difference among Christians themselves, in their diligence and dexterity about heart-work: some are more conversant and successful in it than others are; but he that takes no heed to his heart, that is not careful to order it aright before God, is but a hypocrite: “They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them;

for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Here were a company of formal hypocrites, as it is evident by that expression, "as my people"—like them, but not of them. And what made them so? Their outside was fair: here were reverent postures, high professions, much seeming joy and delight in ordinances—"thou art to them as a lovely song:" yea, but for all that, they kept not their hearts with God in those duties; their hearts were commanded by their lusts; they went after their covetousness. Had they kept their hearts with God, all had been well; but not regarding which way their hearts went in duty, there lay the core of their hypocrisy.

OBJECTION. If any upright soul should hence infer, "Then I am a hypocrite too; for many times my heart departs from God in duty: do what I can, yet I cannot hold it close with God."

ANSWER. To this I answer, the very objection carries in it its own solution. Thou sayest, "Do what I can, yet I cannot keep my heart with God." Soul, if thou doest what thou canst, thou hast the blessing of an upright, though God sees good to exercise thee under the affliction of a discomposed heart. There remains still some wildness in the thoughts and fancies of the best to humble them; but if you find a care before to prevent them, opposition against them when they come, and grief

and sorrow afterwards, you find enough to clear you from reigning hypocrisy. 1. This fore-care is seen, partly in laying up the word in our hearts, to prevent them: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee;" partly in our endeavors to engage our hearts to God, and partly in begging preventing grace from God in our onsets upon duty. It is a good sign where this care goes before a duty. 2. It is a sweet sign of uprightness to oppose these sins in their first rise: "I hate vain thoughts;" "The Spirit lusteth against the flesh." 3. Thy after-grief discovers thy upright heart. If, with Hezekiah, thou art humbled for the evils of thy heart, thou hast no reason for these disorders to question the integrity of it: but to suffer sin to lodge quietly in the heart, to let thy heart habitually and uncontrolledly wander from God, is a sad and dangerous symptom indeed.

3. *The beauty of our conversation* arises from the heavenly frame and holy order of our spirits. There is a spiritual lustre and beauty in the conversation of saints; "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor:" saints shine as the lights of the world; but whatever lustre and beauty appear in their lives, comes from the excellency of their spirits; as the candle within puts a lustre upon the lantern in which it shines. It is impossible that a disordered and neglected heart should ever produce a well-ordered conversation; and since,

as the text observes, the issues or streams of life flow out of the heart as their fountain, it must needs follow, that such as the heart is, the life will be; hence, "abstain from fleshly lusts—having your conversation honest," or beautiful, as the Greek word imports. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." His way notes the course of his life, his thoughts the frame of his heart; and therefore, since the way and course of his life flows from his thoughts, or the frame of his heart, both or neither will be forsaken. The heart is the womb of all actions; these actions are virtually and seminally contained in our thoughts; these thoughts, being once made up into affections, are quickly made out into suitable actions and practices. If the heart be wicked, then, as Christ saith, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries," etc. Mark the order: first wanton or revengeful thoughts, then unclean or murderous practices. And if the heart be holy and spiritual, then, as David speaks from sweet experience, "My heart is inditing a good matter; I speak of the things which I have made; my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer." Here is a life richly beautified with good works: some ready-made—"I will speak of the things which I have made;" others upon the wheel, making—"My heart is inditing;" but both proceeding from the heavenly frame of his heart.

Put but the heart in frame, and the life will quickly show that it is so. I think it is not very difficult to discern, by the duties and converse of Christians, what frames their spirits are in. Take a Christian in a good frame, and how serious, heavenly, and profitable will his conversation and duties be! What a lovely companion is he, during the continuance of it! It would do any one's heart good, to be with him at such a time. "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment; the law of his God is in his heart." When one's heart is up with God, and full of God, how dexterously and ingeniously will he wind in spiritual discourse, improving every occasion and advantage to some heavenly purpose. Few words then run to waste.

And what else can be the reason why the discourse and duties of many Christians are become so frothy and unprofitable, their communion both with God and one another become as a dry stalk, but because their hearts are neglected? Surely this must be the reason of it, and verily it is an evil greatly to be bewailed. For want of this, Christian fellowship, has become a sapless thing: so the attracting beauty that was wont to shine from the conversation of the saints upon the faces and consciences of the world—which, if it did not allure and bring them into love with the ways of God, yet, at the least, left a testimony in their con-

sciences of the excellency of those men and their way—is in a great measure lost, to the unspeakable detriment of religion.

Time was when Christians so lived, that the world stood gazing at them, as the word, 1 Peter, 4 : 4, imports. Their life and language were of a different strain from others'; their tongues discovered them to be Galileans, wherever they came; but now, since vain speculations and fruitless controversies have so much obtained, and heart-work, practical godliness, is so much neglected among professors, the case is sadly altered, their discourse is become like other men's. If they come among you now, they may "hear every man speak in his own language." And truly I have little hope to see this evil redressed, and the credit of religion again repaired, until Christians return to their first works, till they ply heart-work closer. When the salt of heavenly-mindedness is again cast into the spring, the streams will run clearer and sweeter.

4. *The comfort of our souls* doth much depend upon the keeping of our hearts; for he that is negligent in attending his own heart, is ordinarily a great stranger to assurance and the sweet comforts flowing from it. If the Antinomian doctrine were true, which teaches you to reject all marks and signs for the trial of your condition, telling you it is the Spirit only that immediately assures you, by witnessing your adoption directly, without them—

then you might be careless of your hearts, yea, strangers to them, and yet not strangers to comfort; but since both Scripture and experience do confute this dotage, I hope you will never look for comfort in that unscriptural way. I deny not but it is the work and office of the Spirit to assure you; and yet do confidently affirm, that if ever you attain assurance in the ordinary way wherein God dispenses it, you must take pains with your own heart: you may expect your comforts upon easier terms; but I am mistaken if ever you enjoy them upon any other. "Give all diligence; prove yourselves:" this is the scripture way. I remember Mr. Roberts, in his treatise on the covenant, tells us, that he knew a Christian who, in the infancy of his Christian life, so vehemently panted after the infallible assurance of God's love, that for a long time together he earnestly desired some voice from heaven; yea, sometimes walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraeulous voice from the trees and stones there: this, after many desires and longings, was denied him; but in time a better was afforded, in the ordinary way of searehing the word and his own heart. An instance of the like nature the learned Gerson gives us, of one that was driven by temptation upon the very borders of desperation. At last, being sweetly settled and assured, one asked him how he attained it. He answered, "Not by any extraordinary revelation, but

by subjecting my understanding to the Scriptures, and comparing my own heart with them." The Spirit indeed assures by witnessing our adoption; and he witnesseth two ways.

Objectively; that is, by working those graces in our souls which are the conditions of the promise; and so the Spirit and his graces in us are all one: the Spirit of God dwelling in us is a mark of our adoption. Now, the Spirit cannot be discerned in his essence, but in his operations; and to discern these is to discern the Spirit; and how these should be discerned without serious searching, and diligent watching of the heart, I cannot imagine.

The other way of the Spirit's witnessing is *effectively*; that is, by irradiating the soul with a grace-discovering light, shining upon his own work; and this, in the order of nature, follows the former work: he first implants the grace, and then opens the eye of the soul to see it. Now, since the heart is the subject of that grace, even this way of the Spirit's witnessing also includes the necessity of keeping carefully our own hearts: for,

(1.) A neglected heart is so confused and dark, that the little grace which is in it is not ordinarily discernible. The most accurate and laborious Christians, that take most pains, and spend most time about their hearts, do yet find it very difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit there: how then shall the Christian, who is com-

paratively negligent and remiss about heart-work, be ever able to discover it? Sincerity, which is the thing sought for, lies in the heart like a small piece of gold in the bottom of a river; he that will find it must stay till the water is clear and settled, and then he shall see it sparkling at the bottom: and that the heart may be clear and settled, how much pains and watching, care and diligence will it cost.

(2.) God doth not usually indulge lazy and negligent souls with the comfort of assurance: he will not so much as seem to patronize sloth and carelessness: he will give assurance, but it shall be in his own way: his command hath united our care and comfort together: they are mistaken that think the beautiful child of assurance may be born without pangs. Ah, how many solitary hours have the people of God spent in heart-examination; how many times have they looked into the word, and then into their hearts! Sometimes they thought they discovered sincerity, and were even ready to draw forth the triumphant conclusion of assurance; then comes a doubt they cannot resolve, and dashes all again: many hopes and fears, doubtings and reasonings they have had in their own breasts, before they arrived at a comfortable settlement.

(3.) But suppose it possible for a careless Christian to attain assurance, yet it is impossible he should long retain it; for it is a thousand to one if those whose hearts are filled with the joys of assur-

ance, long retain those joys, unless extraordinary care be used. A little pride, vanity, carelessness, dashes all that for which thou hast been laboring a long time in many a weary duty. Since, then, the joy of our life, the comfort of our souls, rise and fall with our diligence in this work, keep your hearts with all diligence.

5. *The improvement of our graces* depends upon the keeping of our hearts. I never knew grace thrive in a negligent and careless soul: the habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart; and the deeper they are rooted there, the more thriving and flourishing grace is. We read of being "rooted" in grace, Eph. 3:17: grace in the heart is the root of every gracious word in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand. Ps. 116:10; 2 Cor. 4:13. It is true, Christ is the root of a Christian; but Christ is the originating root, and grace a root originated, planted, and influenced by Christ: according as this thrives under divine influence, so the acts of grace are more or less vigorous and fruitful. Now, in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fructifying influences are stopped and cut off, multitudes of vanities break in upon it, and devour its strength. The heart is as it were the pasture, in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day; a gracious heart diligently kept, feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day: "How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God! How great

is the sum of them ! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand ; when I awake, I am still with thee." And as the gracious heart feeds and nourishes them, so they refresh and feast the heart : " My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness while I think upon thee." But in the disregarded heart, swarms of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and jostle out those spiritual ideas and thoughts of God by which the soul should be refreshed.

Besides, the careless heart makes nothing out of any duty or ordinance it performs or attends on ; and yet these are the conduits of heaven, whence grace is watered and made fruitful. A man may go with a heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never be improved by them ; for heart-neglect is a leak in the bottom : no heavenly influences, how rich soever, abide in that soul. Matt. 13 : 3, 4. When the seed falls upon the heart that lies open and common like the highway, free for all passengers, the fowls come and devour it. Alas, it is not enough to hear, unless we take heed how we hear : a man may pray, and never be the better, unless he watch unto prayer. In a word, all ordinances, means, and duties, are blessed unto the improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness we use in keeping our hearts in them.

6. *The stability of our souls* in the hour of temp-

tation, will be much according to the care and conscience we have of keeping our hearts. The careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hour of temptation: his main batteries are raised against that fort-royal, the heart; if he wins that, he wins all, for it commands the whole man. And alas, how easy a conquest is a neglected heart! It is no more difficult to surprise it, than for an enemy to enter a city whose gates are open and unguarded. It is the watchful heart that discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength.

Divines observe this to be the method in which, temptations are ripened and brought to their full strength: There is first the irritation of the object, or that power it hath to work upon and provoke our corrupt nature; which is either done by the real presence of the object, or else by speculation, when the object, though absent, is held out by the imagination before the soul: then follows the motion of the sensitive appetite, which is stirred and provoked by the fancy, representing it as a sensual good, as having profit or pleasure in it: then there is a consultation in the mind about it, deliberating about the likeliest means of accomplishing it: next follows the election or choice of the will, and lastly, the desire or full engagement of the will to it.

All this may be done in a few moments; for the debates of the soul are quick, and soon ended. When it comes thus far, the heart is won; Satan

hath entered victoriously, and displayed his colors upon the walls of that royal fort. But had the heart been well guarded at first, it had never come to this height; the temptation had been stopped in the first or second act: and indeed there it is stopped easily; for it is in the motions of a soul tempted to sin, as in the motion of a stone falling from the brow of a hill: it is easily stopped at first, but when once it is set agoing, "*Vires acquirit eundo*"—it gains force in descending. Therefore it is the greatest wisdom to observe the first motions of the heart, to check and stop sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at first: a little care and watchfulness may prevent much mischief now, which the careless heart not heeding, is brought within the power of temptation, as the Syrians were brought blindfold into the midst of Samaria before they knew where they were.

By this time, reader, I hope thou art fully satisfied how essential and necessary a work is the keeping of thy heart; it being a duty that wraps up in it so many dear interests of the soul.

CHAPTER III.

OCCASIONS FOR SPECIAL DILIGENCE.

I NOW proceed, according to the method proposed, *to point out those special OCCASIONS in the life of a Christian, which call for and require our utmost diligence in keeping the heart*; for though, as was observed before, the duty binds always, and there is no time or condition of life in which we may be excused from this work, yet there are some signal seasons, critical hours, requiring more than a common vigilance over the heart.

I. PROSPERITY. One of these is the time of prosperity, when providence smiles upon us, and dandles us upon its knee. Now, Christian, keep thy heart with all diligence; for now it will be exceeding apt to grow secure, proud, and earthly. Bernard saith, "To see a man humble under prosperity, is one of the greatest rarities in the world." Even a good Hezekiah could not hide a vain-glorious temper under his temptation. Hence also that caution to Israel: "And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware to thy fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou buildedst not, and houses full of good things which thou filledst not—then beware lest thou

forget the Lord." And indeed so it fell out, for "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked." How then may a Christian keep his heart from pride and carnal security, under the smiles of Providence and a confluence of creature comforts?

There are seven choice helps to secure the heart from the dangerous snares of prosperity. The first is this :

Help 1. Consider the dangerous, ensnaring *temptations* attending a pleasant and prosperous condition. Few, yea, very few, of those that live in the pleasures and prosperity of this world, escape everlasting perdition. "It is easier," saith Christ, "for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." "Not many mighty, not many noble are called." It might justly make us tremble when the Scripture tells us in general, that few shall be saved; much more when it tells us, that of that rank and sort of which we are speaking, but few shall be saved. When Joshua called all the tribes of Israel to lot upon them for the discovery of Achan, doubtless Achan feared; when the tribe of Judah was taken, his fear increased; but when the family of the Zarhites was taken, it was time to tremble. So, when the Scripture comes so near as to tell us, that of such a sort of men very few shall escape, it is time to look about us. Chrysostom said, "I should wonder if any of the rulers be saved." O,

how many have been coached to hell in the chariots of earthly pleasures, while others have been whipped to heaven by the rod of affliction! How few, like the daughters of Tyre, come to Christ with a gift; how few among the rich entreat his favor!

Help 2. It may keep us yet more humble and watchful in prosperity, if we consider, that among Christians *many have been much the worse for it.* How good had it been for some of them if they had never known prosperity. When they were in a low condition, how humble, spiritual, and heavenly were they; but when advanced, what an apparent alteration hath been upon their spirits. It was so with Israel, when they were in a low condition in the wilderness: then Israel was "holiness to the Lord." But when they came into Canaan, and were fed in a fat pasture, then, "We are lords; we will come no more unto thee." Outward gains are ordinarily attended with inward losses: as in a low condition their civil employments were wont to have a savor of their duties, so in an exalted condition their duties commonly have a savor of the world. He is indeed rich in grace, whose graces are not hindered by his riches. There are but few in the world like Jehoshaphat, of whom it is said, "He had silver and gold in abundance, and his heart was lifted up in the way of God's commands." Will not this keep thy heart humble in prosperity, to think how dear many godly men have paid for their

riches; that through them they have lost that which all the world cannot purchase?

Help 3. Keep down thy vain heart by this consideration, that *God values not a man a jot the more* for these things. God values no man by outward excellencies, but by inward graces: they are the internal ornaments of the spirit which are of great price in God's eyes. He despises all worldly glory, and accepts no man's person; "but in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." Indeed, if the judgment of God went by the same rule that man's doth, we might value ourselves by these things, and stand upon them. But as one said when dying, "I shall not appear before God as a doctour, but as a man:" so much every man is as he is in the judgment of God, and no more. Doth thy heart yet swell; and will neither of the former considerations keep it humble? Then,

Help 4. Consider *how bitterly many dying persons have bewailed their folly*, that ever they set their hearts upon these things, and heartily wished that they had never known them. What a sad story was that of Pius Quintus, who, dying, cried out despairingly, "When I was in a low condition, I had some hopes of salvation; but when I was advanced to be cardinal, I greatly doubted it; but since I came to the popedom, I have no hope at all." Mr. Spencer also tells us a real, but sad story of a rich op-

pressor, who had scraped up a great estate for his only son. When he came to die, he called his son to him, and said, "Son, do you indeed love me?" The son answered, that nature, besides his paternal indulgence, obliged him to that. "Then," said the father, "express it by this: hold thy finger in the candle as long as I am saying a *Pater Noster*"—the Lord's Prayer. The son attempted, but could not endure it. Upon that the father broke out into these expressions: "Thou canst not suffer the burning of thy finger for me; but to get this wealth I have hazarded my soul for thee, and must burn body and soul in hell for thy sake; thy pain would have been but for a moment, but mine will be unquenchable fire."

Help 5. The heart may be kept humble, by considering of *what a clogging nature earthly things are* to a soul heartily engaged in the way to heaven: they shut out much of heaven from us at present, though they may not shut us out of heaven at last. If thou consider thyself as a stranger in this world, travelling for heaven and seeking a better country, thou hast then as much reason to be taken and delighted with these things, as a weary horse hath with a heavy cloak-bag. There was a serious truth in that atheistical scoff of Julian, when he took away the Christians' estates, and told them it was to make them fitter for the kingdom of heaven.

Help 6. Is thy spirit, for all this, puffed up and

lofty? Then urge upon it the consideration of *that awful day of reckoning*, wherein, according to our receipt of mercies shall be our account for them; and methinks this should awe and humble the vainest heart that ever was in the breast of a saint. Know for certain that the Lord records all the mercies that ever he gave thee, from the beginning to the end of thy life: "Remember, O my people." Yea, they are exactly numbered and recorded, in order to an account; and thy account will be suitable: "To whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required." You are but stewards, and your Lord will come to take an account of you. And what a great account have you to make who have much of this world in your hand! What swift witnesses will your mercies be against you, if this be the best fruit of them!

Help 7. It is a very humbling consideration, that the *mercies of God should not work upon my spirit as they do upon the spirits of others*, to whom they come as sanctified mercies from the love of God. Ah, Lord, what a sad consideration is this. Enough to lay me in the dust, when I consider,

(1.) That their mercies have greatly humbled them: the higher God has raised them, the lower they have laid themselves before God. Thus did Jacob when God had given him much substance: "And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou

hast showed thy servant ; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and I am now become two bands." And thus it was with holy David : when God had confirmed the promise to him, to build him a house, and not reject him as he did Saul, he goes in before the Lord, and says, " Who am I ? and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto ? " And so indeed God required. When Israel was to bring to God the first fruits of Canaan, they were to say, " A Syrian ready to perish was my father." Deut. 26 : 5. Do others raise God the higher for his raising them ? And the more God raises me, the more shall I abuse him and exalt myself ? Oh, what a sad thing is this !

(2.) Others have freely ascribed the glory of all their enjoyments to God, and magnified not themselves, but him, for their mercies. Thus David said, " Let thy name be magnified, and the house of thy servant be established." He doth not fly upon the mercy, and suck out the sweetness of it, looking no further than his own comfort. No, he cares for no mercy, except God be magnified in it. So, when God had delivered him from all his enemies, he says, " The Lord is my strength and my rock ; he is become my salvation." He did not put the crown upon his own head, as I do.

(3.) The mercies of God have been melting mercies unto others, melting their souls in love to the God of their mercies. So Hannah, when she re-

ceived the mercy of a son, said, "My soul rejoiceth in the Lord;" not in the mercy, but in the God of the mercy. And so Mary said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour." The word signifies, to "make more room" for God; their hearts were not contracted, but the more enlarged to God.

(4.) The mercies of God have been mighty restraints to keep others from sin. "Seeing thou our God hast given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments?" Ingenuous souls have felt the force of the obligations of love and mercy upon them.

(5.) The mercies of God to others have been as oil to the wheels of their obedience, and made them fitter for service. 2 Chron. 17:5. Now, if mercies work contrarily upon my heart, what cause have I to be afraid that they come not to me in love. I tell you, this is enough to damp the spirits of any saint, to see what sweet effects they have had on others, and what sad effects on him.

II. ADVERSITY. The second special season in the life of a Christian, requiring more than a common diligence to keep his heart, is the time of adversity. When providence frowns upon you, and blasts your outward comforts, then look to your hearts, keep them with all diligence from repining against God, or fainting under his hand; for troubles, though sanctified, are troubles still. Jonah was a good

man, and yet how pettish was his heart under affliction. Job was the mirror of patience, yet how was his heart discomposed by trouble. You will find it as hard to get a composed spirit under great afflictions, as it is to fix quicksilver. Oh, the hurries and tumults which they occasion, even in the best hearts. How, then, may a Christian, under great afflictions, keep his heart from repining or desponding under the hand of God? There are nine special helps I shall here offer to keep thy heart in this condition.

Help 1. Consider, that by these cross providences *God is faithfully pursuing the great design of electing love* upon the souls of his people, and orders all these afflictions as means sanctified to that end.

Afflictions come not by casualty, but by counsel. Job 5 : 6 ; Eph. 1 : 11. By this counsel of God they are ordained as means of much spiritual good to saints. "By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged." Isa. 27 : 9. "But he for our profit." Heb. 12 : 10. "All things work together for good." Rom. 8 : 28. They are God's workmen upon our hearts, to pull down our pride and carnal security; and being so, their nature is changed: they are turned into blessings and benefits. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Surely, then, thou hast no reason to quarrel with God, but rather to admire that he should concern himself so much in thy good as to use any means for accom-

plishing it. Paul could bless God, if by any means he might attain the resurrection of the dead. "My brethren," saith James, "count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations." My Father is about a design of love upon my soul, and do I well to be angry with him? All that he does is in pursuance of, and in reference to, some eternal, glorious ends upon my soul. Oh, it is my ignorance of God's design that makes me quarrel with him! He saith to thee in this case, as to Peter, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

Help 2. Though God hath reserved to himself a liberty of afflicting his people, yet he hath bound himself by promise *never to take away his loving kindness* from them. Can I look that scripture in the face with a repining, discontented spirit? "I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of man, and with the stripes of the children of men; but my mercy shall not depart away from him." 2 Sam. 7:14, 15. Oh, my heart, my haughty heart, doest thou well to be discontented, when God hath given thee the whole tree, with all the clusters of comfort growing on it, because he suffers the wind to blow down a few leaves? Christians have two sorts of goods—the goods of the footstool, and the goods of the throne; movables and immovables. If God hath secured these, never let my heart be troubled at the loss of those. Indeed, if he had cut

off his love, or discovenanted my soul, I had reason to be cast down ; but this he hath not done, nor can he do it.

Help 3. It is of marvellous efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under afflictions, to call to mind that *thine own Father hath the ordering of them*. Not a creature moves hand or tongue against thee, but by his permission. Suppose the cup be a bitter cup, yet it is the cup which thy Father hath given thee to drink ; and canst thou suspect poison to be in that cup which he delivers thee ? Foolish man, put home the case to thine own heart, consult with thine own affections. Canst thou find in thy heart to give thy child that which would hurt or undo him ? No ; thou wouldst as soon hurt thyself as him. If thou, then, being evil, knowest how to give good gifts to thy children, how much more doth God ? The very consideration of his nature—a God of love, pity, and tender mercies—or of his relation to thee, as a father, husband, friend, might be security enough if he had not spoken a word to quiet thee in this case ; and yet you have his word too, “ I will do you no hurt.” You lie too near his heart for him to hurt you : nothing grieves him more than your groundless and unworthy suspicions of his designs. Would it not grieve a faithful, tender-hearted physician, when he has studied the case of his patient, and prepared the most excellent medicines to save his life, to hear him cry out, “ Oh, he

has undone me, he has poisoned me!" because it gripes and pains him in the operation? Oh, when will you be ingenuous?

Help 4. God respects you as much in a low as in a high condition, and therefore it need not so much trouble you to be made low; nay, to speak home, *he manifests more of his love, grace, and tenderness*, in the time of affliction, than of prosperity. As God did not at first choose you because you were high, so he will not forsake you because you are low. Men may look shy upon you, and alter their respects as your condition is altered. When Providence hath blasted your estates, your summer friends may grow strange, as fearing you may be troublesome to them; but will God do so? No, no. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." If adversity and poverty could bar you from access to God, it were indeed a sad condition; but you may go to God as freely as ever. "My God," saith the church, "will hear me." Poor David, when stripped of all earthly comforts, could yet encourage himself in the Lord his God; and why cannot you? Suppose your husband or child had lost all at sea, and should come to you in rags, could you deny the relation, or refuse to entertain him? If you would not, much less will God. Why, then, are you so troubled? Though your condition be changed, your Father's love and respects are not changed.

Help 5. And what if, by the loss of outward com-

forts, God will *preserve your souls from the ruining power of temptation*, surely then you have little cause to sink your hearts by such sad thoughts about them. Are not these earthly enjoyments the things that make men shrink in times of trial? For the love of these, many have forsaken Christ in such an hour. The young ruler "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." And if this be God's design, what a wickedness have I done in quarrelling with him about it. We see mariners, in a storm, can throw overboard rich bales of silk, and precious things, to preserve the vessel and their lives with it; and every one saith they act prudently. We know it is usual for soldiers, in a city besieged, to batter down and burn the fairest buildings without the walls, in which the enemy may take shelter in the siege; and no man doubts but it is wisely done. Such as have gangrened legs or arms, can willingly stretch them out to be cut off, and not only thank, but pay the surgeon for his pains. And must God be repined at for casting over what would sink you in a storm; for pulling down that which would advantage your enemy in the siege of temptation; for cutting off what would endanger your everlasting life? O inconsiderate, ungrateful man, are not these things for which thou grieveest, the very things that have ruined thousands of souls? Well, what Christ does in this thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou mayest.

Help 6. It would much stay the heart under adversity to consider that God, by such humbling providences, may be *accomplishing that joy for which you have long prayed and waited*; and should you be troubled at that? Say, Christian, hast thou not many prayers depending before God upon such accounts as these—that he would kill and mortify thy lusts; that thy heart may never find rest in any enjoyment but Christ? By such humbling and impoverishing strokes, God may be fulfilling thy desires. Wouldst thou be kept from sin? Lo, “he hath hedged up thy way with thorns.” Wouldst thou see the creature’s vanity? Thy affliction is a fair glass to discover it; for the vanity of the creature is never so effectually and sensibly discovered, as in our own experience of it. Wouldst thou have thy corruptions mortified? This is the way God takes away the food and fuel that maintained them; for, as prosperity begat and fed them, so adversity, when sanctified, is a means to kill them. Wouldst thou have thy heart rest nowhere but in the bosom of God? What better way canst thou imagine Providence should take to accomplish thy desire, than by pulling from under thy head that soft pillow of creature-delights on which thou restedst before? And yet you fret at this. Peevish child, how dost thou exercise thy Father’s patience. If he delay to answer thy prayers, thou art ready to say he regards thee not. If he do that which really

answers the scope and main end of them, but not in the way thou expectest, thou quarrelest with him for that, as if, instead of answering, he were crossing all thy hopes and aims. Is this ingenuous? Is it not enough, that God is so gracious to do what thou desirest, but thou must be so unreasonable as to expect he will do it in the way which thou prescribest?

Help 7. It may stay thy heart, if thou consider that in these troubles God is about that work in which, *if thou didst see its design, thy soul would rejoice.* We poor creatures are beclouded with much ignorance, and are not able to discern how particular providences work towards God's end; and therefore, like Israel in the wilderness, are often murmuring because Providence leads us about in a howling desert, where we are exposed to straits, though he then led them, and is now leading us, "by the right way to a city of habitations." If you could but see how God in his secret counsel hath exactly laid the whole plan and design of thy salvation, even to the smallest means and circumstances: This way, and by these means, such a one shall be saved, and by no other: such a number of afflictions I appoint for this man, at this time, and in this order; they shall befall him thus, and thus they shall work for him. Could you, I say, but discern the admirable harmony of divine dispensations, their mutual relations to each other, together with

the general respect and influence they all have to the last end, of all conditions you would choose that you are now in, had you liberty to make your own choice. Providence is like a curious piece of needlework, made up of a thousand shreds, which, singly, we know not what to make of, but put together in order, they represent a beautiful history to the eye. As God works all things according to the counsel of his own will, so that counsel of God hath ordained this as the best way to bring about thy salvation. Such a one hath a proud heart: so many humbling providences I appoint for him. Such a one has an earthly heart: so many impoverishing providences for him. Did you but see this, I need say no more to support the most dejected heart.

Help 8. It would much conduce to the settlement of your heart, to consider that *by fretting and discontent you do yourself more injury than all the afflictions you lie under could do.* Your own discontent is that which arms your troubles with a sting; you make your burden heavy by struggling under it. Could you but lie quiet under the hand of God, your condition would be much easier and sweeter than it is. This makes God lay on more strokes, as a father will upon a stubborn child that receives not correction.

Besides, it unfits the soul to pray over its troubles, or take in the sense of that good which God

intends by them. Affliction is a pill, which, being wrapt up in patience and quiet submission, may be easily swallowed; but discontent chews the pill, and so imbitters the soul. God throws away some comfort which he saw would hurt you, and you will throw away your peace after it; he shoots an arrow which sticks in your clothes, and was never intended to hurt, but only to frighten you from sin; and you will thrust it onward to the piercing of your very heart by despondency and discontent.

Help 9. If all this will not do, but thy heart, like Rachel, still refuses to be comforted or quieted, then consider one thing more, which, if rightly pondered, will doubtless do the work; and that is this: *compare the condition* thou art now in, and art so much dissatisfied with, with the condition in which others are and thyself deservest to be. Others are roaring in flames, howling under the scourge of vengeance, and among them I deserve to be. O my soul, is this hell? Is my condition as bad as that of the damned? O, what would thousands now in hell give to change conditions with me! "I have read," saith Taylor, "that when the Duke of Conde had entered voluntarily into the inconveniences of a religious poverty, he was one day espied and pitied by a lord of Italy, who, out of tenderness, wished him to be more careful of his person. The good duke answered, 'Sir, be not troubled, and think not that I am ill provided with conven-

iences ; for I send a harbinger before me, who makes ready my lodgings, and takes care that I be royally entertained.' The lord asked him who was his harbinger. He answered, 'The knowledge of myself, and the consideration of what I deserve for my sins, which is eternal torments ; and when with this knowledge I arrive at my lodging, however unprovided I find it, methinks it is ever better than I deserve.' " "Why doth a living man complain?" Thus the heart may be kept from desponding or repining under adversity.

III. ZION'S TROUBLES. The third season calling for more than ordinary diligence to keep the heart, is the time of Zion's troubles. When the church, like the ship in which Christ and his disciples were, is oppressed and ready to perish in the waves of persecution, then good souls are ready to sink and be shipwrecked too amid the billows of their own fears. It is true, most men rather need the spur than the reins in this case, and yet some sit down as overweighed with the sense of the church's troubles. The loss of the ark cost old Eli his life ; the sad posture Jerusalem lay in, made good Nehemiah's countenance change in the midst of all the pleasures and accommodations of the court. Ah, this comes close to honest hearts.

But though God allow, yea, command the most awakened apprehensions of these calamities, and in such a day calls to "mourning, weeping, and gird-

ing with sackcloth," and severely threatens the insensible ; yet it will not please him to see you sit like pensive Elijah under the juniper-tree : " Ah, Lord God, it is enough ; take away my life also." No ; mourners in Zion you may and ought to be, but self-tormentors you must not be ; complain to God you may, but to complain of God, though by an unsuitable carriage, and the language of your actions, you must not.

How then may devoted and tender hearts be relieved and supported, when they are even overweighed with the burdensome sense of Zion's troubles ? I grant it is hard for him that preferreth Zion to his chief joy, to keep his heart that it sink not below the due sense of his troubles ; and yet this ought to, and may be done, by the use of such heart-establishing directions as these :

Direction 1. Settle this great truth in your hearts, that *no trouble befalls Zion but by the permission of Zion's God* ; and he permits nothing out of which he will not bring much good at last to his people. There is as truly a principle of quietness in the permitting, as in the commanding will of God. See it in David : " Let him alone ; it may be, God hath bidden him." And in Christ : " Thou couldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above." It should much calm our spirits that it is the will of God to suffer it ; and had he not suffered it, it could never have been as it is.

This very consideration quieted Job, Eli, David, and Hezekiah. That the Lord did it, was enough to them; and why should it not be so to us? If the Lord will have Zion ploughed as a field, and her goodly stones lie in the dust; if it be his pleasure that antichrist shall rage yet longer, and wear out the saints of the Most High; if it be his will that a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity, by the Lord God of hosts, shall be upon the valley of vision—that the wicked shall devour the man that is more righteous than he—what are we that we should contest with God? Fit it is that we should be resigned to that will whence we proceeded, and that he that made us should dispose of us as he pleaseth. He may do what seemeth him good without our consent. Doth poor man stand upon equal ground, that he should capitulate with his Creator, or that God should render him an account of any of his matters? It is every way as reasonable that we be content, however God dispose of us, as that we be obedient to whatever he commands us.

But if we pursue this argument further, by considering that God's permissions do all meet at last in the real good of his people, this will much more quiet our spirits. Do the enemies carry away the good figs, even the best among the people into captivity? This looks like a sad providence; but yet God sends them thither for their good. Doth God

take the Assyrians as a staff in his hand to beat his people with? Those blows are smart, and make them cry out; but the end of his so doing is, “that he may accomplish his whole work upon mount Zion.” If God can bring much good out of the worst and greatest evil of sin, much more out of temporal afflictions; and it is as evident that he will, as that he can do so. For it is inconsistent with the wisdom of a common agent, to permit any thing which he might prevent if he please, to cross his great design and end; and can it be imagined that the most wise God should do so?

Well then, as Luther said to Melancthon, *Desinat Philippus esse rector mundi*—“Cease, Philip, to be the governor of the world”—so say I to you, Let infinite wisdom, power, and love, alone; for by these all creatures are swayed, and all actions guided, in reference to the church. It is none of our work to rule the world, but to submit to Him that doth; the motions of Providence are all judicious, the wheels are full of eyes; it is enough that the affairs of Zion are in a good hand.

Direction 2. Ponder this heart-supporting truth, in reference to Zion’s trouble, That how many troubles soever are upon her, *yet her King is in her*. What, hath the Lord forsaken his churches; hath he sold them into the enemy’s hand; doth he not regard what evil befalls them, that our hearts sink at this rate? Is it not a shameful undervaluing of

the great God, and magnifying of poor impotent men, to fear and tremble at creatures, while God is in the midst of us? The church's enemies are many and mighty—let that be granted; yet that argument with which Caleb and Joshua strove to raise their own hearts, is of as much force now as it was then: "The Lord is with us; fear them not." The historian tells us, that when Antigonus overheard his soldiers reckoning how many their enemies were, and so discouraging one another, he suddenly stepped in among them with this question, "And how many do you reckon me for?" Discouraged souls, how many do you reckon the Lord for? Is he not an overmatch for all his enemies? Is not one Almighty more than many mighties? Doth his presence stand for nothing with us? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" What, think you, was the reason of the great exploration Gideon made, in Judges 6? He questions, ver. 12, 13; he desires a sign, ver. 17; and after that another, ver. 36. And what was the end of all this, but that he might be sure the Lord was with him, and that he might write this motto upon his ensign, "The sword of THE LORD and of Gideon?" So, if you can be well assured the Lord is with his people, you will rise thereby above all your discouragements; and that he is so, you need not seek a sign from heaven; lo, you have a sign before you, even their marvellous preservation amidst all their ene-

mies. If God be not with his people, how is it they are not swallowed up? Do their enemies want malice, power, or opportunity? No; but there is an invisible hand upon them. Let his presence, then, give us rest; and though the mountains be hurled into the sea, though heaven and earth mingle together, fear not; God is in the midst of Zion, she shall not be moved.

Direction 3. Ponder *the great advantages* attending the people of God in an afflicted condition. If a low and an afflicted state in the world be really best for the church, then your dejections are not only irrational, but ungrateful. Indeed, if you estimate the happiness of the church by its worldly ease, splendor, and prosperity, then such times of affliction will seem bad for it; but if you reckon its glory to consist in its humility, faith, patience, and heavenly-mindedness, no other condition so abounds with advantages. It was not persecutions and prisons, but worldliness and wantonness, that poisoned the church; neither was it the earthly glory of its professors, but the blood of its martyrs, that was the seed of the church. The power of godliness did never thrive better than in affliction, and never ran lower than in times of greatest prosperity: "When we are left a poor and an afflicted people, then we learn to trust in the name of the Lord." What say you? Is it indeed for the saints' advantage to be weaned from the love of ensnaring

worldly vanities—to be quickened and spurred forward with more haste to heaven—to have clearer discoveries of their own hearts—to be taught to pray more fervently, frequently, spiritually—to look and long for the rest to come more ardently? If these be for their advantage, experience teacheth us that no condition is ordinarily blessed with such fruits as these, like an afflicted condition.

Is it well to repine and droop, because your Father consults more the advantage of your souls than your worldly pleasure—because he will bring you to heaven by a nearer way than you are willing to go? Is this a due requital of his love, who is pleased so much to concern himself in your welfare? which is more than he will do for thousands in the world, upon whom he will not lay a rod, or spend an affliction for their good. But, alas, we judge by sense, and reckon things good or evil according to what we for the present can taste and feel in them.

Direction 4. Take heed that you overlook not the many *precious mercies* which the people of God enjoy amidst all their troubles. It is a pity that our tears on account of our troubles should so blind our eyes that we should not see our mercies and grounds of comfort. I will not insist upon the mercy of having your life given you for a prey, nor upon the many outward comforts, temporal conveniences and accommodations which you enjoy, even above

what Christ and his precious servants, of whom the world was not worthy, ever had. But what say you to pardon of sin, interest in Christ, the covenant of promise, and an eternity of happiness in the presence of God after a few days are over? O that ever a people entitled to such mercies as these, should droop under any temporal affliction, or be so much concerned for the frowns of men and loss of trifles. You have not the smiles of great men, but you have the favor of the great God. You are, it may be, cast back in your estates, but thereby furthered in spiritual riches. You cannot live so plentifully and easily as before, but still you may live as holy and heavenly a life as ever. Will you then grieve so much for these circumstantials, as to forget your substantials? Shall light troubles make you forget weighty mercies? Remember, the Christian's true riches are laid out of the reach of all his enemies: they may make you poor, but not miserable. What though God do not distinguish, in his outward dispensations, between his own and others? Yea, what though his judgments single out the best, and spare the worst? What though an Abel be killed in love, and a Cain survive in hatred; a bloody Dionysius die in his bed, and a good Josiah fall in battle? What though the belly of the wicked be filled with hid treasures, and the teeth of the saints broken with gravel stones? Yet still here is much matter of praise: for electing love

has distinguished, though common providences did not; and while prosperity and impunity slay the wicked, even slaying and adversity shall benefit and save the righteous.

Direction 5. Believe that how low soever the church be plunged under the waters of adversity, *it shall assuredly rise again.* Fear not; for as sure as Christ arose the third day, notwithstanding the seal and watch set upon him, so sure the church shall arise out of all her troubles, and lift up her victorious head over all her enemies. There is no fear of ruining that people that thrive by their losses, and multiply by being diminished. Be not too quick to bury the church before she is dead! Stay till Christ hath tried his skill before you give her up for lost. The bush may be all in a flame, but shall never be consumed; and that because of the good-will of Him that dwelleth in it.

Direction 6. Remember the famous instances of God's care and tenderness over his people *in former straits.* Christ hath not suffered them to be devoured yet; for above these 1,700 years the Christian church hath lived in affliction, and yet it is not consumed; many a wave of persecution has gone over it, and yet it is not drowned; many designs have been formed to ruin it, and hitherto none hath prospered. This is not the first time that Hamans and Ahithophels have plotted its ruin—that a Herod hath stretched out his hand to vex it;

still it has been preserved from, supported under, or delivered out of all its troubles. And is it not as dear to God as ever? Is he not as able to save it now as formerly? Though we know not whence deliverance should arise, yet "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations."

Direction 7. If you can get no comfort from any of the former arguments, try whether you cannot draw some comfort *out of your very trouble*. Surely this trouble of yours is a good argument of your integrity; union is the ground of sympathy: if you had not some rich adventure in that ship, you would not tremble as you do when it is in danger. Besides, this frame of spirit may afford you this argument, that if you are sensible of the church's troubles, Jesus Christ is much more sensible of, and solicitous about it than you can be, and he will have an eye of favor upon them that mourn for it. Isa. 57 : 18.

IV. PUBLIC DANGER AND DISTRACTION. The fourth special occasion requiring our utmost diligence in keeping our hearts, is the time of danger and public distraction. In such times the best hearts are but too apt to be surprised by slavish fear; it is not easy to secure the heart against distraction in times of common destruction. If Syria be confederate with Ephraim, how do the hearts of the house of David shake; even as the trees of the wood which are shaken with the wind. When there are ominous

signs in the heavens, and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and waves roaring, then the hearts of men fail for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. Even Paul himself may sometimes complain of fightings within, when there are fears without. 2 Cor. 7:5.

But, my brethren, these things ought not to be so; saints should be of a more raised spirit. So was David when his heart was kept in a good frame: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Let none but the servants of sin be the slaves of fear; let them that have delighted in evil, fear evil: O let not that which God hath threatened as a judgment upon the wicked, ever seize upon the breasts of the righteous: "I will send faintness into their hearts in the land of their enemies, and the sound of a shaking leaf shall chase them." What poor-spirited men are these, to fly at a shaking leaf, which makes a pleasant, and not a terrible noise, and is in itself a kind of natural music; but to a guilty conscience, the whistling leaves are drums and trumpets. "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of love and of a sound mind." A sound mind, as it stands there in opposition to the spirit of fear, is an unwounded conscience not weakened by guilt; and this should make a man bold as a lion. I know it

cannot be said of a saint, as God spoke of leviathan, that he is made without fear ; there is a natural fear in every man, and it is impossible wholly to put it off. It is a perturbation of the mind, arising from the apprehension of approaching danger ; and as long as dangers can approach us, we shall find some perturbations within us. It is not my purpose to commend to you a stoical apathy, nor yet to dissuade you from such a degree of preventive fear as may fit you for trouble, and be serviceable to your souls. There is a provident fear that opens our eyes to foresee danger, and quickens us to a prudent and lawful use of means to prevent it : such was Jacob's fear. Gen. 32 : 7-12. But I would persuade you to keep your hearts from that tyrannical passion which invades the heart in times of danger ; distracts, weakens, and unfits the heart for duty ; drives men upon unlawful means, and brings a snare with it.

How then may a Christian keep his heart from distracting and tormenting fears in times of great and threatening dangers ? To answer this end, there are four excellent rules or helps.

Rule 1. Look upon all creatures as *in the hand of God*, who manages them in all their motions ; limiting, restraining, and determining them all at his pleasure. Get this truth well settled by faith in your hearts, it will marvellously guard you against slavish fears. The first chapter of Ezekiel

contains an admirable scheme or draught of providence. There you may see the living creatures who move the wheels, that is, the great affairs and turnings of things here below, coming unto Christ, who sits upon the throne, to receive new orders and instructions from him, verses 24–28 ; and in Rev. 6 you may read of white, black, and red horses, which are nothing else but the instruments which God employs in executing his judgments in the world, as war, pestilence, and death : but when these horses are prancing and trampling up and down the world, here is a consideration that may quiet our hearts : God hath the reins in his hand. Wicked men are sometimes like mad horses ; they would stamp the people of God under their feet, but that the bridle of Providence is in their lips. A lion at liberty is terrible to meet, but who is afraid of the lion in the keeper's hand ?

Rule 2. Remember that this God, in whose hand all the creatures are, is *your Father*, and is much more tender of you, than you are or can be of yourselves : “ He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye.” Let me ask the most timorous woman whether there be not a vast difference between the sight of a drawn sword in the hand of a bloody ruffian, and of the same sword in the hand of her own tender husband ? As great a difference there is in looking upon creatures by the eye of sense, and looking on them as in the hand of your God,

by an eye of faith: that is a sweet scripture to this purpose—"Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name;" he is Lord of all the hosts of creatures in the world. Who would be afraid to pass through an army, though all the soldiers should turn their swords and guns towards him, if the general of that army were his friend or father? I have met with an excellent story of a religious young man, who, being at sea with many other passengers in a great storm, and they being half dead with fear, he only was observed to be very cheerful, as if he had been but little concerned in the danger. One of them demanding the reason of his cheerfulness, "Oh," said he, "it is because the pilot of the ship is my Father." Consider Christ, first, as the King and supreme Lord over the providential kingdom; and then, as your Head, Husband, and Friend, and you will quickly say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." This truth will make you cease trembling, and cause you to sing in the midst of dangers, "The Lord is King of all the earth; sing ye praises with understanding;" or, as the Hebrew word is, "every one that hath understanding;" that is, of this heart-reviving and establishing doctrine of the dominion of our Father over all creatures.

Rule 3. Urge upon your hearts the *express prohibitions of Christ* in this case; and let your hearts stand in awe of the violation of them. He hath

charged you not to fear : “ When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, see that you be not terrified.” “ In nothing be terrified by your adversaries.” Yea, in Matt. 10 : 26, 28, 31, and within the compass of six verses, our Saviour commands us thrice not to fear man. Doth every big word of proud dust and ashes make thee afraid ? Doth the voice of a man make thee tremble ; and shall not the voice of God ? If thou art of such a fearful and timorous spirit, how is it that thou fearest not to disobey the plain commands of Jesus Christ ? Methinks the command of Christ should have as much power to calm, as the voice of a poor worm to terrify thy heart. “ I, even I, am he that comforteth you : who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker ?” We cannot fear creatures sinfully, till we have forgotten God : did we remember what he is, and what he hath said, we should not be of such feeble spirits. Bring thy heart then to this dilemma, in times of danger : If I let into my heart the slavish fear of man, I must let out the reverential awe and fear of God : and dare I cast off the fear of the Almighty for the frowns of a man ; shall I lift up proud dust above the great God ; shall I run upon a certain sin, to shun a probable danger ? Oh, keep thy heart by this consideration.

Rule 4. Remember *how much needless trouble your vain fears have brought upon you formerly*, and how you have disquieted yourselves to no purpose ; “ And hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy : and where is the fury of the oppressor ? ” He seemed ready to devour, but yet you are not devoured : I have not brought upon you the thing that you feared : you have wasted your spirits, disordered your soul, and weakened your hands, and all this to no purpose. You might have all this while enjoyed your peace, and possessed your souls in patience. And here I cannot but observe a very deep policy of Satan, managing a design against the soul by these vain fears. I call them vain in view of the frustration of them by Providence ; but certainly they are not in vain as to the end Satan aims at in raising them ; for herein he acts as soldiers in the siege of a garrison, who, on purpose to wear out the besieged by constant watchings, and thereby unfit them to make resistance when they storm it in earnest, do every night give them false alarms, which, though they come to nothing, yet serve this further design of the enemy. O when will you beware of Satan’s devices ?

Rule 5. Consider solemnly, that though the things you fear should really take place, yet *there is more evil in your own fear than in the thing*

fear'd; and that, not only as the least evil of sin is worse than the greatest evil of suffering, but as this sinful fear hath really more torment and trouble in it, than there is in that condition you are so much afraid of. Fear is both a multiplying and a tormenting passion; it represents troubles as much greater than they are, and so tortures and racks the soul much worse than when the suffering itself comes. So it was with Israel at the Red sea: they cried out, and were sore afraid till they set foot in the water, and then a passage was opened through those waters which they thought would have drowned them. Thus it is with us: we, looking through the glass of carnal fear upon the waters of trouble, the swellings of Jordan, cry out, O they are unfordable; we must needs perish in them. But when we come into the midst of those floods indeed, we find the promise made good, "God will make a way to escape." Thus it was with the blessed martyr Bilney, when he would make a trial by putting his finger to the candle; and not able to endure that, he cried out, What, cannot I bear the burning of a finger? How then shall I be able to bear the burning of my whole body to-morrow? And yet, when that morrow came, he could go cheerfully into the flames, with this scripture in his mouth: "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I

will be with thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned." Isa. 43 : 1, 2.

Rule 6. Consult *the many precious promises* which are written for your support and comfort in all dangers. These are your refuge, to which you may fly and be safe when the arrows of danger fly by night, and destruction wasteth at noonday. There are particular promises suited to particular cases and exigencies ; and there are general promises, reaching all cases and conditions, such as these : " All things shall work together for good, to them that love God." " Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet it shall be well with them that fear the Lord." Could you but believe the promises, your heart should be established. Could you but plead them with God as Jacob did, " Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good," etc., they would relieve you in every distress.

Objection. But that promise was made personally, and by name, to him : these are not so made to me.

Answer. If Jacob's God be your God, you have as good an interest in them as he had. The church, a thousand years after that transaction between God and Jacob, applied that which God spoke to him, as if it had been spoken to themselves : " He found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us."

Rule 7. Quiet your trembling hearts by *consulting your past experiences* of the care and faithfulness of God in former distresses. These experiences

are food for your faith while in the wilderness. By this David kept his heart in time of danger, 1 Sam. 17 : 37, and Paul his, 2 Cor. 1 : 10. It was sweetly answered by Silentiarius, when one told him that his enemies waylaid him to take away his life, "If God take no care of me, how have I escaped hitherto?" You may plead with God old experiences to procure new ones; for it is in pleading with God for new deliverances, as it is in pleading for new pardons. Now mark how Moses pleads on that account with God: "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt until now." Num. 14 : 19. He doth not say as men do, Lord, this is the first fault, thou hast not been troubled before to sign their pardon; but he says, Lord, because thou hast pardoned them so often, I beseech thee pardon them once again. So in new straits, Lord, thou hast often heard, helped, and saved in former years, therefore now help again; for with thee there is plenteous redemption, and thine arm is not shortened.

Rule 8. Be well satisfied that you are *in the way of your duty*, and that will beget holy courage in times of danger. "Who will harm you, if you be followers of that which is good?" Or, if any dare attempt it, you may boldly commit yourselves to God in well-doing. It was this consideration that

raised Luther's spirit above all fear : " In the cause of God," said he, " I ever am, and ever shall be stout : herein I assume this title, *Cedo nulli*"—I yield to none. A good cause will bear up a man's spirit bravely. Hear the saying of a heathen, to the shame of cowardly Christians : When the emperor Vespasian had commanded Fluidius Priscus not to come to the senate, or if he did, to speak nothing but what he would have him, the senator returned this noble answer : that " as he was a senator, it was fit he should be at the senate ; and if being there he were required to give his advice, he would speak freely that which his conscience commanded him." The emperor threatening that then he should die, he answered, " Did I ever tell you that I was immortal ? Do you what you will, and I will do what I ought : it is in your power to put me to death unjustly, and in mine to die with constancy." Righteousness is a breastplate ; the cause of God will sustain all you venture upon it : let them tremble whom danger finds out of the way of duty.

Rule 9. Get your conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ from all guilt, and that will set your heart above all fear. It is guilt upon the conscience that makes cowards of our spirits ; " the righteous are bold as a lion." It was guilt in Cain's conscience that made him cry, " Every one that findeth me will slay me." A guilty conscience is more

terrified by fancied dangers, than a pure conscience is with real ones. A guilty sinner carries a witness against himself in his own bosom. It was guilty Herod who cried out, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead." Such a conscience is the devil's anvil, on which he fabricates all those swords and spears with which the guilty sinner pierces and wounds himself. Guilt is to danger, what fire is to gunpowder : a man need not fear to walk among many barrels of powder, if he have no fire about him.

Rule 10. Exercise holy trust in times of great distress. Make it your business to trust God with your life and comforts, and then your heart will be at rest about them. So did David : "At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee;" that is, Lord, if at any time a storm rise, I will make bold to shelter from it under the covert of thy wings. Go to God by acts of faith and trust, and never doubt but he will secure you : "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." God takes it well when thou comest to him thus : Father, my life, my liberty, or estate, are hunted after, and I cannot secure them ; O let me leave them in thy hand : the poor leaveth himself with thee, and doth his God fail him ? No ; thou art the helper of the fatherless : that is, thou art the helper of the destitute one, that hath none to go to but God. This is a

sweet scripture: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord:" he doth not say, His ear shall be exempted from the report of evil tidings—he may hear as sad tidings as other men—but his heart shall be exempted from the terror of those tidings; "his heart is fixed."

Rule 11. Consult the *honor of religion more, and your personal safety less.* Is it for the honor of religion, think you, that Christians should be as timorous as hares, to start at every sound? Will not this tempt the world to think, that, whatever you talk, yet your principles are no better than other men's? O what mischief may the discovery of your fears before them do! It was a noble saying of Nehemiah, "Should such a man as I flee? and who, being as I am, would flee?" Were it not better you should die, than that the world should be prejudiced against Christ by your example? For, alas, how apt is the world—who judge more by what they see in your practice, than by what they understand of your principles—to conclude from your timorousness, that how much soever you commend faith and talk of assurance, yet you dare trust to these things no more than they, when it comes to the trial. O let not your fears lay such a stumbling-block before the blind world.

Rule 12. He who will secure his heart from fear, must first *secure the eternal interest of his soul in*

the hands of Jesus Christ. When this is done, then you may say, Now, world, do thy worst. You will not be very solicitous about a vile body, when you are once assured it shall be well to all eternity with your precious soul. “Fear not them,” saith Christ, “that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” The assured Christian may smile with contempt upon all his enemies, and say, Is this the worst that they can do? What say you, Christians; are you assured that your souls are safe, that within a few moments of your dissolution they shall be received by Christ into an everlasting habitation? Well, if you be sure of that, never trouble yourselves about the instruments and means of your dissolution.

Objection. A violent death is terrible to nature.

Answer. But what matter is it when thy soul is in heaven, whether it were let out at thy mouth, or at thy throat—whether thy familiar friends, or barbarous enemies stood about thy dead body and closed thine eyes? Alas, it is not worth the making so much ado about: thy soul shall not be sensible in heaven how thy body is used on earth; no, it shall be swallowed up in life.

Rule 13. Learn to quench all slavish creature fears, in *the reverential fear of God.* This is a cure by diversion. It is a rare piece of Christian wisdom to turn those passions of the soul which most predominate into spiritual channels, to turn

natural anger into spiritual zeal, natural mirth into holy cheerfulness, and natural fear into a holy dread and awe of God. This method of cure Christ prescribes in Matt. 10. Like to which is Isa. 8 : 12, 13 : "Fear not their fear." But how shall we help it? Why, "sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear and your dread." Natural fear may be allayed for the present by natural reason, or the removal of the occasion; but then it is but like a candle blown out with a puff of breath, which is easily lighted again; but if the fear of God extinguish it, then it is like a candle quenched in water, which cannot be rekindled.

Rule 14. Lastly, *pour out to God in prayer* those fears which the devil and your own unbelief pour in upon you in times of danger. Prayer is the best outlet to fear. Where is the Christian that cannot set his seal to this direction? I will give you the greatest example to encourage you in the use of it, even the example of Jesus Christ. When the hour of his danger and death drew nigh, he went into the garden, separated from the disciples, and then wrestled mightily with God in prayer, even unto an agony; in reference to which the apostle saith, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, to him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." He was heard as to strength and support

to carry him through it, though not as to deliverance or exemption from it.

O that these things may abide with you, and be reduced to practice in these evil days, that many trembling souls may be established by them.

V. OUTWARD STRAITS AND WANTS. The fifth season requiring this diligence in keeping the heart, is the time of straits and outward pinching wants. Although at such times we should complain to God, and not of God—the throne of grace being erected for a time of need—yet, when the waters of relief run low, and want begins to pinch hard, how prone are the best hearts to distrust the fountain. When the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruse are almost spent, our faith and patience are almost spent too. Now, it is difficult to keep down the proud and unbelieving heart in a holy quietude and sweet submission at the foot of God. It is an easy thing to talk of trusting God for daily bread, while we have a full barn or purse; but to say as the prophet, “Though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine, yet will I rejoice in the Lord,” surely this is not easy.

How, then, may a Christian keep his heart from distrusting God, or repining against him when outward wants are either felt or feared? This question deserves to be seriously pondered, and especially to be studied now, since it seems to be the design of Providence to empty the people of God of their

creature-fulness, and acquaint them with those straits to which they have hitherto been altogether strangers. To secure the heart from the forementioned dangers attending this condition, these following considerations, through the blessing of the Spirit, may prove effectual.

Consideration 1. If God reduces you to straits and necessities, yet *he deals no otherwise therein with you, than he hath done with some of the choicest and holiest men that ever lived.* Your condition is not singular; though you have hitherto been a stranger to wants, other saints have daily conversed and been familiarly acquainted with them. Hear what blessed Paul speaks, not of himself only, but in the name of other saints reduced to like exigencies: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place." To see such a man as Paul going up and down the world with a naked back and empty belly, and not a house to put his head in—one that was so far above thee in grace and holiness—one that did more service for God in a day, than perhaps thou hast done in all thy days—and yet thou repine as if hardly dealt with! Have you forgot what even a David hath suffered? How great were his straits and necessities! "Give, I pray thee," saith he to Nabal, "whatsoever cometh to thy hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David." The renowned

Musculus was forced to dig in the town-ditch for a maintenance ; and the famous Ainsworth, as I have been credibly informed, was forced to sell the bed he lay on to buy bread. But why speak I of these ? Behold a greater, even the Son of God, “ who is the heir of all things, and by whom the worlds were made,” yet sometimes having nothing to eat : “ And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry : and seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon.” Hereby, then, God hath set no mark of hatred upon you ; neither can you infer the want of love, from the want of bread. When thy repining heart puts the question, Was there ever any sorrow like unto mine ? ask these worthies, and they will tell thee, that though they did not complain and fret as thou dost, yet they were driven to as great straits as thou art.

Consideration 2. If God leave you not without a promise, in this neecessitous condition, you have no reason to repine or despond under it. That is a sad condition indeed, to which no promise belongs. Calvin, in his comment upon these words, Isa. 9 : 1, “ Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation,” etc., solves the doubt, in what sense the darkness of the captivity was not so great as that of the lesser incursions made by Tiglath Pileser. In the captivity, the city was destroyed and the temple burnt with fire ; an affliction in-

comparably greater than the other : but yet the darkness should not be so great, because, says Calvin, "there was a certain promise made in this case, but none in the other."

It is better to be as low even as hell *with a promise*, than in paradise *without* one. Even the darkness of hell itself would be comparatively no darkness at all, were there but a promise to enlighten it. Now God hath left many sweet promises for the faith of his poor people to feed on in this condition ; such as these : " O fear the Lord, ye his saints ; for there is no want to them that fear him. The lions do lack, and suffer hunger ; but they that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing." "The eye of the Lord is upon the righteous, to keep them alive in famine." "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." Here you see both their extreme wants, water being put even for the necessaries of life ; and their certain relief, "I the Lord will hear them ;" in which it is supposed that they cry unto him in their straits, and he hears their cry. Having therefore these promises, why should not your distrustful heart conclude like

David's, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Objection. But these promises imply conditions ; if they were absolute, they would afford more satisfaction.

Answer. What are those tacit conditions you speak of, but these : 1. That he will either supply or sanctify your wants ; 2. that you shall have so much as God sees fit for you. And does this trouble you ? Would you have the mercy, whether sanctified or not ; whether God sees it fit for you or not ? Methinks the appetites of saints after earthly things should not be so ravenous as to seize greedily upon any enjoyment, not caring how they obtain it.

Objection. But Oh, when wants pinch, and I see not whence supplies should come, then my faith in the promise shakes, and like murmuring Israel, I cry, "He gave bread ; can he give water also ?"

Answer. O unbelieving heart, when did his promises fail ? who ever trusted them, and was ashamed ? May not God upbraid thee with thine unreasonable infidelity, as, Jer. 2 : 31, "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel ; a land of darkness ?" or as Christ said to the disciples, "Since I was with you, lacked ye any thing ?" Yea, may you not upbraid yourself ; may you not say with good old Polycarp, "These many years I have served Christ, and found him a good master ?" Indeed he may deny your wantonness, but not what your real wants call for ; he will

not regard the cry of lusts, nor yet despise the cry of your faith : though he will not indulge and humor your wanton appetites, yet he will not violate his own faithful promises. These promises are your best security for eternal life ; and it is strange if they should not satisfy you for daily bread. Remember the words of the Lord, and solace your heart with them amidst all your wants. It is said of Epicurus, that in the dreadful paroxysms of the cholic, he often refreshed himself by calling to mind his inventions in philosophy ; and of Possidonius the philosopher, that in an attack of the stone he solaced himself with discourses on moral virtue ; and when the pain twinged him, he would say, “ O pain, thou doest nothing ; though thou art a little troublesome, I will never confess thee to be evil.” If upon such grounds as these they could support themselves under such grinding and racking pain, and even delude their diseases by them, how much rather should the precious promises of God, and the sweet experiences which have gone along step by step with them, make you to forget all your wants, and comfort you in every strait.

Consideration 3. If it be bad now, *it might have been worse.* Hath God denied thee the comforts of this life ? He might have denied thee Christ, peace, and pardon also, and then thy case had been woful indeed. You know God hath done so to millions in the world. How many such

wretched objects may our eyes behold every day, that have no comfort in hand, nor yet in hope ; that are miserable here, and will be so to eternity ; that have a bitter cup, and nothing to sweeten it ; no, not so much as any hope that it will be better. But it is not so with you : though you be poor in this world, yet you are “rich in faith, and an heir of the kingdom which God has promised.” O learn to set spiritual riches over against temporal poverty. Balance all your present troubles with your spiritual privileges. Indeed, if God had denied your soul the robe of righteousness to clothe it, the hidden manna to feed it, the heavenly mansions to receive it—if your soul were left destitute as well as your body, you might well be pensive ; but the consideration that God has denied no spiritual gift, should bring the considering soul to rest under any outward strait. It was bravely said by Luther, when want began to pinch him, “Let us be contented with our hard fare ; for do we not feast with angels upon Christ the bread of life ?” “Blessed be God,” saith Paul, “who hath abounded to us in all spiritual blessings.”

Consideration 4. Though this affliction be great, *God hath far greater with which he chastises the dearly beloved of his soul* in this world ; and should he remove this, and inflict those, you would account your present state a very comfortable state, and bless God to be as now you are.

What think you? Should God remove your present troubles, supply all your outward wants, give you the desire of your hearts in creature-comforts, but hide his face from you, shoot his arrows into your souls, and cause the venom of them to drink up your spirits—should he leave you but a few days to the buffeting of Satan and his blasphemous suggestions—should he hold your eyes but a few nights waking with horrors of conscience, tossing to and fro till the dawning of the day—should he lead you through the chambers of death, show you the visions of darkness, and make his terrors set themselves in array against you—then tell me if you would not count it a choice mercy to be back again in your former necessitous condition, with peace of conscience; and think bread and water, with God's favor, a happy state? O then, take heed of repining. Say not that God deals hardly with you, lest you provoke him to convince you, by your own sense and feeling, that he hath worse rods than these for unsubmissive and froward children.

Consideration 5. If it be bad now, *it will be better shortly.* Keep thy heart by that consideration. The meal in the barrel is almost spent: well, be it so; why should that trouble me, if I am almost beyond the need and use of all these things? The traveller hath spent almost all his money, and has but a shilling or two left: well, saith he, though my money be almost spent, yet my journey

is almost finished too; I am near home, and then I shall be fully supplied. If there be no candles in the house, yet it is a comfort to think that it is almost day, and then there will be no need of candles. I am afraid, Christian, you misreckon when you think your provision is almost spent, and you have a great way to travel—many years to live, and nothing to live upon. It may be not half so many as you suppose. In this be confident, if your provision be spent, either fresh supplies are coming—though you see not from whence—or you are nearer your journey's end than you reckon yourself to be. Desponding soul, doth it become a man travelling upon the road to that heavenly city, and almost arrived there, within a few days' journey of his Father's house where all his wants shall be supplied, to take on thus about a little meat, drink, or clothes, which he fears he shall want by the way? It was a noble saying of the forty martyrs, famous in ecclesiastical story; when turned out naked in a frosty night to be starved to death, they comforted one another with these words: "The winter indeed is sharp and cold, but heaven is warm and comfortable: here we shiver for cold, but Abraham's bosom will make amends for all."

Objection 1. But I may die for want.

Answer. 1. Who ever did so? When were the righteous forsaken? 2. If so, your journey is ended, and you fully supplied.

Objection 2. But I am not sure of that ; were I sure of heaven, it were another matter.

Answer. Are you not sure of that ? Then you have other matters to trouble yourselves about than these. Methinks these should be the least of all your cares. I do not find that souls perplexed and troubled about the want of Christ and the pardon of sin, are usually very anxious or solicitous about these things. He that seriously puts such questions as these, What shall I do to be saved ? How shall I know my sin is pardoned ? doth not usually trouble himself with, “ What shall I eat, what shall I drink, or wherewithal shall I be clothed ? ”

Consideration 6. Doth it become the children of such a Father to distrust his all-sufficiency, or repine at any of his dispensations ? Do you well to question his care and love upon every new exigency ? Say, have you not been ashamed of this formerly ? Hath not your Father’s seasonable provision for you in former straits, put you to the blush, and made you resolve never to question his love and care any more ; and yet will you renew your unworthy suspicions of him ? Disingenuous child, reason thus with thyself : If I perish for want of what is good and needful for me, it must be because my Father either knows not my wants, or hath not wherewith to supply them, or else regards not what becomes of me. Which of these shall I charge up-

on him? Not the first; for my Father knows what I have need of, my condition is not hid from him. Not the second; for "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." His name is God all-sufficient. Not the last; for "as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." "The Lord is exceeding pitiful, and of tender mercy." "He hears the young ravens when they cry;" and will he not hear me? "Consider," saith Christ, "the fowls of the air;" not the fowls at the door, that are every day fed by hand, but the fowls of the air, that have none to provide for them. Doth he feed and clothe his enemies, and will he forget his children? He heard the very cry of Ishmael in distress. O my unbelieving heart, dost thou yet doubt? Remember Hagar and the child. Gen. 21 : 17.

Consideration 7. Your poverty is *not your sin, but your affliction*. If you have not brought it upon yourselves by sinful means, and if it be but an affliction, it may be borne the easier for that. It is hard indeed to bear an affliction coming upon us as the fruit and punishment of sin. When men are under trouble on that account, they are ready to say, O, if it were but a single affliction coming from the hand of God by way of trial, I could bear it; but I have brought it upon myself by sin, it comes as the punishment of sin; the marks of God's displeasure are upon it; it is the guilt within that

troubles and galls more than the want without. But it is not so as to your poverty, and therefore you have no reason to be cast down under it.

Objection 1. But though there be no sting of guilt, yet this condition wants not other stings: as, first, the discredit of religion—I cannot comply with my engagements in the world, and thereby religion is like to suffer.

Answer. It is well you have a heart to discharge every duty; yet if God disable you by providence, it is no discredit to your profession that you do not that which you cannot do, so long as it is your desire and endeavor to do what you can and ought to do; and in this case God's will is, that lenity and forbearance be exercised towards you. Deut. 24 : 12, 13.

Objection 2. But it grieves me to behold the necessities of others whom I was wont to relieve and refresh, but now cannot.

Answer. If you cannot, it ceases to be your duty; and God accepts the drawing out of your soul to the hungry in compassion and desire to help them, though you cannot draw forth a full purse to relieve and supply them.

Objection 3. But I find such a condition full of temptations, a sore clog in the way to heaven.

Answer. Every condition in the world hath its clogs and attending temptations; and were you in a prosperous condition, you might there meet with

more temptations and fewer advantages than you now have ; for though I confess poverty hath its temptations as well as prosperity, yet I am confident prosperity hath not those excellent advantages that poverty hath ; for here you have an opportunity to discover the sincerity of your love to God, when you can live upon him, find enough in him, and constantly follow him, even when all external inducements and motives fail.

Thus I have shown you how to keep your heart from the temptations and dangers attending a poor and low condition in the world ; when want pinches, and the heart begins to sink, then improve and bless God for these helps to keep it.

VI. RELIGIOUS DUTIES. The sixth season requiring this diligence in keeping the heart, is the season of duty. When we draw nigh to God in public, private, or secret duties, then it is time to look to the heart, for the vanity of the heart seldom discovers itself more than at such times. How oft doth the poor soul cry out, O Lord, how fain would I serve thee, but vain thoughts will not let me. I came to open my heart to thee, to delight my soul in communion with thee, but my corruptions have set upon me. Lord, call off these vain thoughts, and suffer them not to estrange the soul which is espoused to thee. The question then is this, How may the heart be kept from distraction by vain thoughts in the time of duty ?

There is a twofold distraetion, or wandering of the heart, in duty. 1. Voluntary and habitual : "They set not their hearts aright, and their spirit was not steadfast with God." This is the ease with formalists, and it proeeeds from the want of a holy bent and inelination of the heart to God ; their hearts are under the power of their lusts, and therefore it is no wonder they go after their lusts, even when they are about holy things. Ezek. 33 : 31. 2. Involuntary and lamented distraetion : "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. O wretched man that I am ; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This proeeeds not from the want of a holy bent and aim, but from the weakness and imperfeetion of graee. And in this ease the soul may make eomplaint against its own eorruptions, like that of Abijah did against Jeroboam : "Yet Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, is risen up against his lord, when Rehoboam was young and tender-hearted, and eould not withstand him, and there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial." Graee hath dominion, but lusts are mutinous and seditious during the infaney thereof. But it is not my business to show you how these distraetions come into the heart, but rather how to get and keep them out of the heart. In order whereunto, take these ten following helps :

Help 1. Sequester yourselves from all earthly

employments, and set apart some time for *solemn preparation* to meet God in duty. You cannot come reeking hot out of the world into God's presence, but you will find a tang of it in your duties. It is with the heart a few minutes since plunged in the world, now at the feet of God, just as with the sea after a storm, which still continues working, muddy, and disquiet, though the wind be laid and the storm over: thy heart must have some time to settle. There are few musicians that can take down a lute or viol, and play at once upon it, without some time to tune it; there are few Christians can at any moment say, "My heart is fixed, O God, it is fixed." When you go to God in any duty, take your heart aside, and say, O my soul, I am now addressing myself to the greatest work that ever a creature was employed about: I am going into the awful presence of God, about business of everlasting moment. O my soul, leave trifling now; be composed, watchful, serious: this is no common work; it is God-work, soul-work, eternity-work. I am now going forth bearing seed, which will bring forth fruit to life or death in the world to come. Pause a while, and consider your sins, your wants, your troubles: address yourself to duty. David first mused, and then spoke with his tongue. Psalm 39:3, 4. So Psalm 45:1, "My heart is inditing a good matter."

Help 2. Having composed thy heart by previous

meditation, presently *set a guard upon thy senses*. How often are poor Christians in danger of losing the eyes of their mind by those of their body: for this Job covenanted with his senses; for this David prayed, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way." This may serve to expound that mystical Arabian proverb, which advises to "shut the windows, that the house may be light." It were excellent if you could say in your entrance upon duty, as a holy man once did when he returned from duty, "Be shut, O mine eyes, be shut; for it is impossible you should ever see such beauty and glory in any creature, as I have now seen in God." You had need to avoid all occasions of distraction from without, for be sure you will meet enough from within. Intentness of spirit in the work of God, locks up the eye and ear against vanity. When Marcellus entered the gates of Syracuse, Archimedes was so intent about his mathematical scheme, that he took no notice of the soldiers when they entered his very study with drawn swords. A fervent heart cannot be a vagrant heart.

Help 3. Beg of God a mortified fancy. "A working fancy," saith one, "how much soever it be extolled among men, is a great snare to the soul, except it work in fellowship with right reason and a sanctified heart." The fancy is a power of the soul placed between the senses and the understand-

ing ; it is that which first stirs itself in the soul, and by its motion other powers are stirred ; it is the common shop where thoughts are first forged and framed, and as this is, so are they, if imaginations be not first cast down : it is impossible that every thought of the heart should be brought into obedience to Christ. The fancy is naturally the wildest and most untameable power in the soul. Some Christians have much to do with it.

And truly, the more spiritual the heart is, the more it is troubled about the vanity and wildness of it. O, what a sad thing it is, that thy nobler soul must lackey up and down after a vain roving fancy—that such a beggar should ride on horseback, and such a prince run after on foot—that it should call off the soul from attendance upon God, when it is most sweetly engaged in communion with him, to prosecute such vanities as it will start at such times before it. Beg earnestly of God that the power of sanctification may once come upon it. Some Christians have attained such a degree of sanctification of their imagination, that they have had much sweetness left upon their hearts by the spiritual workings of it in the night season. When thy fancy is more mortified, thy thoughts will be more orderly and fixed.

Help 4. If you would keep your heart from those vain excursions, realize to yourself in duties, by faith, *the holy and awful presence of God.* If the

presence of a grave man will compose us to seriousness, how much more the presence of a holy God! Thinkest thou thy soul durst be so gay and light, if the sense of a divine eye were upon it? Remember, the place where thou art is the place of his feet. Isa. 60 : 13. Act faith upon the omniscience of God: "All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give to every one of you according to your works." "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Realize his infinite holiness. Into what a serious, composed frame did the sight of God in his holiness put the spirit of the prophet. Isa. 6 : 5. Labor to get also upon thy heart due apprehensions of the greatness of God, such as Abraham had: "I that am but dust and ashes, have taken upon me to speak to God." And remember the jealousy of God, how tender he is of his worship: "And Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified." Lev. 10 : 3.

"A man that is praying," saith Bernard, "should behave himself as if he were entering into the court of heaven, where he sees the Lord upon his throne, surrounded with ten thousands of his angels and saints ministering unto him." When thou comest from a duty, in which thy heart hath been wandering, thou mayest say, "Verily, God was in this

place, and I knew it not." Suppose all the imperinences and vanities which have passed through thy heart in duty were written out, and interlined with thy petitions, couldst thou have the face to present it to God? Should thy tongue but utter all the thoughts of thy heart in prayer, would not men abhor thee? Why, thy thoughts are vocal to God. If thou wert petitioning the king for thy life, would it not provoke him to see thee playing with thy band-strings, or catching every fly that lights upon thy clothes, while thou art speaking to him about such serious matters? O think sadly upon that scripture, "God is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are round about him." Why did God descend in thunderings, and lightnings, and dark clouds, upon Sinai? Why did the mountain smoke under him, the people quake and tremble round about him, yea, Moses himself not exempted, but to teach the people that great truth, "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." Present God thus before thee, and thy vain heart will quickly be reduced to a more serious frame.

Help 5. Maintain a praying frame of heart in the intervals of duty. What is the reason our hearts are so dull, careless, and wandering, when we come to hear or pray, but that there have been

such long intermissions in our communion with God, by reason whereof the heart is out of a praying frame? If that spiritual warmth, those holy impressions we carry from God in one duty, were but preserved to kindle another duty, it would be of marvellous advantage to keep the heart intent and serious with God. For this purpose, intermediate ejaculations, between stated and solemn duties, are of most sweet and excellent use; by these, one duty is as it were linked to another, and so the soul, as it were, wraps up itself in a chain of duties. That Christian seldom misses his mark in solemn duty, that shoots up many of these darts in the intervals of duty. It is an excellent commendation Christ bestows upon the spouse: "Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honey-comb." Upon which text, one gives this sweet note: "The honey-comb actually drops but occasionally, but it always hangs full of sweet drops ready to fall." If our ejaculations were more, our lamentations upon this account would be fewer.

Help 6. Endeavor to engage and raise thy affections to God in duty, if thou wouldst have thy distractions cured. A drooping eye and a melting heart are seldom troubled as others are upon this account. When the soul is intent upon any work, it gathers in its strength and bends all the thoughts to it; and when it is deeply affected, it will be intent. The affections command the thoughts to go

after them; but deadness causes distraction, and distraction increases deadness. Could you but look upon duties as the galleries of communion in which you walk with God, where your souls may be filled with those ravishing and matchless delights that are in his presence, your soul would not offer to stir from thence.

It is with the heart in duty as it is with those that dig for golden ore: they try here, and finding none, try there; and so go from place to place, till at last they hit upon the rich vein, and there they sit down. If thy heart could but once hit the rich vein in duty, it would dwell and abide there with delight and constancy: "O how love I thy law; it is my meditation all the day." The soul can dwell day and night upon its knees, when once its delights, loves, and desires are engaged. What is the reason your heart is so shuffling, especially in sacred duties? Why are you ready to be gone, almost as soon as you are come into the presence of God, but because your affections are not engaged?

Help 7. Mourn over the matter to God, and *call in assistance from heaven*, when vain thoughts assault thy heart in duty. When the messenger of Satan buffeted Paul, by wicked injections as is supposed, he went to God and mourned over it before him. Never slight wandering thoughts in duty as small matters: follow every vain thought with a deep sigh; turn thee to God with such words as

these : Lord, I came hither to speak with thee ; and here a busy devil and a vain heart, conspiring together, have set upon me. O my God, what a heart have I ! Shall I never wait upon thee without distraction ? When shall I enjoy an hour of free communion with thee ? Help me, my God, this once : do but display thy glory before mine eyes, and my heart shall quickly be recovered. Thou knowest I came hither to enjoy thee ; and shall I go away without thee ? See how the heart of thy poor child works towards thee, strives to get near thee, but cannot. My heart is aground : “ Come, thou north wind ; blow, south wind.” O for a fresh gale now from thy Spirit, to set my affections afloat ! Couldst thou but thus affectionately bewail thy distractions to God, thou mightest obtain help and deliverance from them. He would say to Satan and thine imperious lusts, Who are these that assault my child in my work and presence ?

Help 8. Look upon *the success and sweetness of thy duties* as very much depending upon the keeping of thy heart close with God in them. These two things, the success and sweetness of duty, are as dear to a Christian as his two eyes : and both of these must necessarily be lost, if the heart be lost in duty. “ Surely God heareth not vanity, neither doth the Almighty regard it.” The promise is made to a heart engaged : “ Then shall ye seek

me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Well, then, when thou findest thy heart under the power of deadness and distraction, say to thy soul, O what do I lose by a careless heart now! My praying times are the choicest parts, the golden spots of all my time. Could I but raise my heart to God, I might now obtain such mercies as would be matter for a song to all eternity.

Help 9. Look upon it as a great *test of the sincerity or hypocrisy of your heart*, whether you find it careful or careless in this matter. Nothing will startle an upright heart more than this. What, shall I give way to a customary wandering of heart from God? Shall the spot of the hypocrite appear upon my soul? Such men, indeed, can drudge on in the round of duty, never regarding the frame of their hearts, Ezek. 33 : 31, 32 ; but shall I do so? When men come into the presence-chamber, and the king is not there, they bow to the empty chair. O never let me be satisfied with empty duties. Never let me take my leave of a duty, until mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Help 10. It will be of special use to keep thy heart with God in duty, to consider *what influence all thy duties have on thy eternity*. These are your seed-time ; and what you sow in your duties in this world, you must look to reap the fruit of in another world : if you sow to the flesh, of that you shall reap corruption ; but if to the Spirit, life everlast-

ing. O my soul, answer seriously : Wouldst thou be willing to reap the fruit of vanity in the world to come ? Darest thou say, when thy thoughts are roving to the ends of the earth in duty, when thou scarce mindest what thou sayest or hearest, Now, Lord, I am sowing to the Spirit ; now I am providing and laying up for eternity ; now I am seeking for glory, honor, and immortality ; now I am striving to enter in at the strait gate ; now I am taking the kingdom of heaven by a holy violence ? O such a consideration as this should make the multitudes of vain thoughts that press in upon the heart in duty, to fly seven ways before it. Thus I have shown you how to keep your hearts in times of duty.

VII. INJURIES FROM MEN. The seventh season, calling for more than common diligence to keep the heart, is when we receive injuries and abuses from men. Such is the depravity and corruption of man in his fallen state, that one man is become as a wolf or a tiger to another : they are, as the prophet complains, “ as the fishes of the sea, and as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them.” And as wicked men are cruel and oppressive one to another, so they conspire together to abuse and wrong the people of God : as the same prophet complains, “ The wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he.” Now, when we are thus abused and wronged, it is hard to keep the heart

from revengeful motions, to make it meekly and quietly commit the cause to him that judgeth righteously, to exercise no other affection but pity towards them that abuse us. Surely the spirit that is in us lusteth to revenge. But it must not be so: you have choice helps in the gospel to keep down your hearts from such sinful motions against your enemies, and to sweeten your imbittered spirits. When, therefore, thou findest thy heart begin to be inflamed by revengeful motions, presently apply the following remedies:

Remedy 1. Urge upon thy heart the severe *prohibitions of revenge by the law of God*. Remember that this is forbidden fruit, how pleasing and luscious soever it be to our vitiated appetites. O, saith nature, revenge is sweet! O but, saith God, the effects thereof shall be bitter! How plainly hath God interdicted this flesh-pleasing sin! "Say not, I will recompense evil;" "say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me." "Recompense to no man evil for evil;" and, "avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath." Nay, that is not all: but, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." The word *feed* him, as critics observe, signifies to feed cheerfully and tenderly, as birds do their young ones. The scripture is a great friend to the peace and tranquillity of human society, which can never be preserved if revenge be not deposed. It was wont

to be an argument urged by the Christians to prove their religion to be supernatural and pure, that it forbids revenge, which is so sweet to nature : and verily it is a thousand pities such an argument should be lost. Awe your hearts, then, with the authority of God in the scriptures ; and when carnal reason saith, My enemies deserve to be hated, let conscience reply, But, doth God deserve to be disobeyed ? Thus and thus hath my enemy done, and so he hath wronged me : but what hath God done, that I should wrong *him* ? If my enemy dare be so bold as to break the *peace*, shall I be so wicked as to break the *precept* ? If he fears not to wrong me, shall not I fear to wrong God ? Oh, let the fear of God's threatenings repress such sinful notions.

Remedy 2. Set before your eyes the most eminent *patterns of meekness and forgiveness*, that your soul may fall in love with them. This is the way to cut off the common pleas of the flesh for revenge. As thus : No man would bear such an affront. Yes, such and such men have borne as bad, and worse. I shall be reckoned a coward, a fool, if I pass by this. No matter, as long as you follow the example of the wisest and most holy of men. Never did any suffer more and greater abuses from men than Christ did, and never were any more peaceable and forgiving : “ He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth—he

is brought as a lamb to the slaughter." This pattern the apostle sets before you for your imitation : " For even hereunto were ye called ; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." To be of a meek, forgiving spirit is Christlike, Godlike : " That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven ; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." How eminently also did this spirit of Christ rest upon his apostles. Never were there such men upon earth for true excellency of spirit : none were ever abused more, or suffered their abuses better. " Being reviled," say they, " we bless ; being persecuted, we suffer it ; being defamed, we entreat." Calvin, though a man of a quick spirit, yet had attained such a degree of this Christlike forgiveness, that, when Luther had used some opprobrious language of him, the good man said no more but this : " Although he should call me devil, yet I will acknowledge him to be an eminent servant of Jesus Christ."

I have often heard it reported of holy Mr. Dod, that when one, enraged at his close, convincing doctrine, picked a quarrel with him, smote him on the face, and dashed out two of his teeth, this meek

servant of Christ spat out the teeth and blood into his hand, and said, "See here; you have knocked out two of my teeth, and that without any just provocation; but on condition that I might do your soul good, I would give you leave to dash out all the rest." Here is excellency of a Christian spirit above all attainments of moral heathen: though they were excellent at many other things, yet they could never attain this forgiving spirit. "It is the first office of justice," said Tully, "to hurt nobody, unless first provoked by an injury." Whereupon Lactantius remarks, "O what a dainty sentence the orator spoiled by adding these two last words!" Strive then for this excellency of spirit, which is the proper excellency of Christians; do some singular thing that others cannot do, and then you will have a testimony in their consciences. When Moses outdid the magicians, they were forced to confess the finger of God in that business.

Remedy 3. Consider well the character of the person that hath wronged thee. Either he is a good man or a wicked man that hath done thee the injury. If he be a good man, there is light and tenderness in his conscience, and that will bring him at last to a sense of the evil he hath done. Christ hath forgiven him greater injuries than these; and why shouldst not thou? Will Christ not upbraid him with any of those wrongs done to him, but frankly forgive him all; and wilt thou take him by

the throat for some petty abuse that he hath done to thee ?

Or is he a wicked man ? If so, truly you have more need to exercise pity than revenge towards him, and that upon a double account. For, 1. He is beside himself: so indeed is every unconverted sinner. Luke 15 : 17. Should you go into bedlam, and there hear one rail at you, another mock you, and a third threaten you, would you say, I will be revenged upon them ? No ; you would rather go away pitying them : Alas, poor creatures, they are out of their wits, and know not what they do. Besides, 2. There is a day coming, if they repent not, when they will have more misery than you can find in your hearts to wish them. You need not study revenge. God's vengeance sleepeth not, and will shortly take place upon them ; and is not that enough ? Have they not an eternity of misery coming ? If they repent not, this must be the portion of their cup ; and if ever they do repent, they will be ready to make you reparation.

Remedy 4. Keep down thy heart by this consideration, that by revenge thou canst but *satisfy* a sinful passion, but by forgiveness thou shalt *conquer* it. Suppose that, by revenge, thou shouldst destroy one enemy ; I will show thee how, by forgiving, thou shalt conquer three : thine own lust, the devil's temptation, and thine enemy's heart. And is not this a more glorious conquest ? If by revenge

thou overcome thine enemy, yet, as Bernard saith, "Unhappy victory, when, by overcoming another man, thou art overcome by thine own corruption." But by forgiveness you may obtain a glorious conquest indeed. What an honorable victory did David this way obtain over Saul: "And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words, that Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I." It must be a very disingenuous nature indeed, upon which meekness and forgiveness will not work—a stony heart, which this fire will not melt. "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." Rom. 12:20. Some will have this a sin-punishing fire, but others a heart-melting fire: to be sure, it will either melt his heart or aggravate his misery. Augustine thinks that Stephen's prayer for his enemies was the great means of Paul's conversion.

Remedy 5. Seriously propound this question to thy own heart: *Have I got any good* by the wrongs and injuries received, or have I not? If they have done you no good, turn the revenge upon yourself: O that I should have such a bad heart, that can get no good out of such troubles! O that my spirit should be so unlike to Christ's! The patience and meekness of other Christians have turned all the injuries thrown at them into precious stones; the

spirits of others have been raised in blessing God, when they have been loaded with reproaches from the world; they have bound them as an ornament to their necks. Luther said, "I could even be proud upon it, that I have a bad name among wicked men." To the same purpose Jerome said sweetly, "I thank my God that I am worthy to be hated of the world." Thus their hearts were provoked by injuries to magnify God, and bless him for them. If it work contrary with me, I have cause enough to be filled with self-reproach.

If you have got any good by them—if the reproaches and wrongs you have received have made you search your heart the more, watch your ways more narrowly—if their wronging you have made you see how you have wronged God, then let me ask for them what Paul did for himself, Pray forgive them this wrong.

What, can you not find a heart to forgive one that hath been instrumental of so much good to you? That is strange. What though he meant it for evil, yet if God hath turned it to good, you have no more reason to rage against the instrument than he had who received a wound from his enemy, which only broke and let out the imposthume, which otherwise had been his death.

Remedy 6. It is of excellent use to keep the heart from revenge, to look up to *the First Cause*, by whom all our troubles are ordered. This will

calm and meeken our spirits quickly. Never did a wicked tongue try the patience of a saint more than David's was tried by the railing Shimei; yet the spirit of this good man was not at all poisoned with revenge, though Shimei goes along cursing and casting stones at him all the way; yea, though Abishai offered David, if he pleased, the head of that enemy; yet the king said, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who then shall say, wherefore hast thou done so?" It may be that God uses him as his rod to lash me, because I by my sin made his enemies blaspheme him; and shall I be angry with the rod? How irrational were that. This also it was that quieted Job; he doth not rail, and vow revenge upon the Chaldeans and Sabeans, but eyes God as the orderer of those troubles, and is quiet. "The Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Objection. But you will say, To turn aside the right of a man, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.

Answer. True, but though it fall not under his approving, yet it doth under his permitting will; and there is a great argument for quiet submission in that; nay, he hath not only the permitting, but the ordering of all these troubles. Did we see more of a holy God, we would show less of a corrupt nature in such trials.

Remedy 7. Consider how you daily wrong God, and you will not be so easily inflamed with revenge against others that have wronged you. You are daily grieving and wronging God, and yet he bears, forgives, and will not take vengeance upon you; and will you be so quick in revenging yourselves upon others? O what a sharp and terrible rebuke is that, "Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" None should be so filled with pity, forbearance, and mercy to such as wrong them, as those should be that have experienced the riches of mercy themselves. Methinks the mercy of God to us should melt our hearts into mercy for others. It is impossible we can be cruel to others, except we forget how kind Christ hath been to us. Those that have found mercy, should show mercy. If kindness cannot prevail in us, methinks fear should. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Remedy 8. Let the consideration of *the day of the Lord, which draweth nigh*, withhold your heart from anticipating it by acts of revenge. Why are you so quick? Is not the Lord at hand to avenge all his abused servants? "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Be ye also patient, establish your hearts; for the coming of the

Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned. Behold, the Judge standeth at the door." This text affords three arguments against revenge: the Lord's near approach; the example of the husbandman's patience; and the danger we draw upon ourselves by anticipating God's judgment. "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord. He will distribute justice more equally and impartially than you can. They that believe they have a God to right them, will not so much wrong themselves as to avenge their own wrongs.

Objection 1. But flesh and blood are not able to bear such abuses.

Answer. If you resolve to consult flesh and blood in such cases, and do no more but what that will enable you to do, never pretend to religion: Christians must do singular and supernatural things.

Objection 2. But if I put up with such abuses, I shall be reckoned a fool, and every one will trample upon me.

Answer. 1. You may be reckoned so among fools, but God and good men will account it your wisdom, and the excellency of your spirits. 2. It must be a base spirit, indeed, that will trample upon a meek and forgiving Christian. Thus learn to keep your heart from revenge under all provocations.

VIII. GREAT PROVOCATIONS. The next season in which we are in danger of losing our hearts, is,

when we meet with great crosses and provocations. Then sinful passion is apt to transport the heart. It is the fault of many good men to be of hasty and quick spirits when provoked; though they dare not concoct anger into malice, for that would be a sign of wickedness; yet are they very incident to sudden anger, which is a sign of weakness. Beza, in the life of Calvin, observes, that he was of a keen and hasty spirit; and he that writes the life of the great Cameron says, that his anger was soon stirred towards his nearest and familiar friends; but then he would easily subdue it and acknowledge his weakness. Alas, when provocations and trials of our patience come, we know not what spirit we are of.

There are three sorts of anger, natural, holy, and sinful: 1. Natural, instinctive anger, which is not of necessity sinful. 2. Holy anger, which is a pure flame, kindled by a heavenly spark of love to God, and in scripture is called "zeal;" which is, as one saith, the dagger which love draws in God's quarrel. Such was Lot's against the Sodomites, and that of Moses against the idolatrous Israelites. Neither of these is that which I am now persuading you to keep your heart against. But, 3. There is a sinful passion, that is the thing which endangers you. Anger becomes sinful when it is either causeless, Matt. 5 : 22, or excessive; exceeding, either in measure or time, the value of the im-

pulsive cause, be it more transient or abiding ; yet it is a sin, and is matter of humiliation before God. The means to keep the heart from it under provocations, are these :

Means 1. Get low and humble thoughts of yourselves, and then you will have a meek spirit, and a peaceable deportment towards others. The humble is ever the patient man ; pride is the root of passion ; a lofty will be a surly spirit ; bladders blown up with wind will not lie close together, but prick them, and you may pack a thousand in a small room : “ only by pride cometh contention.” When we overrate ourselves, then we think we are unworthily treated by others, and that provokes our anger ; and here take notice of one great benefit of acquaintance with your own heart, even the meekness and calming of your spirit. Christian, methinks thou shouldst know thyself ; and that it should be impossible for any one to lay thee lower or have baser thoughts of thee than thou hast of thyself. O get more humility, and that will bring you more peace.

Means 2. Be often sweetening your spirit in *communion with God*, and it will not easily be embittered with wrath towards men. A quiet conscience never produced an unquiet conversation. The peace of God doth rule in the heart, as an umpire in appeasing strifes ; for so much that word, Col. 3 : 15, imports. Wrath and strife are greatly

opposite to the frame and temper of a spiritual heart, because they are inconsistent with the delight and contentment of that dovelike spirit which loves a sedate and quiet breast. O, saith a soul that feeds upon the sweet communion of the Spirit, shall the sparkles of provocations now catch in my passions, and raise such a smoke in my soul as will offend and drive away the Comforter from me? This is so effectual a remedy against passion, that I durst almost venture, in a Christian of a hasty nature, to make long-suffering a sign of communion with God. Seest thou such a Christian quiet and calm under provocations, it is very probable that his soul feeds upon such sweetness in God as he is loath to leave: and on the other hand, seest thou a Christian turbulent and clamorous, doubtless all is not well within; his spirit is like a bone out of joint, which cannot move without pain and trouble.

Means 3. Get due apprehensions of *the evil nature and effects of sinful anger.* “Anger is a short madness,” saith one. Saith another, “Anger is the fever of the soul.” “It is the interregnum and eclipse of reason,” saith a third. The effects of it are also very sad. 1. It grieves the Spirit of God: banishes him from that breast in which it rages and tumultuates. God is the God of peace; the presence and comforts of God are only enjoyed in the calm. It is a golden note one gives upon the forecited text: “God doth not usually bless with

peace of conscience, such as make no conscience of peace." 2. It gives advantage to the devil. Satan is an angry and discontented spirit, and finds no rest but in restless hearts; he lives, like the salamander, in fires of contention; he bestirs himself when the spirits are in a commotion; sometimes he fills the heart with revengeful thoughts, sometimes he fills the lips and inflames the tongue with violent language: even a meek Moses sometimes spoke unadvisedly with his lips. 3. It untunes the spirit for duty: upon this account the apostle dissuades husbands and wives from jars and contentions, that their prayers be not hindered. All acts of worship must be suitable to the object of worship; but God is the God of peace, the God of love. 4. To mention no more, it disparages the Christian religion. How would Plato and Pythagoras shame us if they were now living. Christ was a lamb for meekness; and doth it become his followers to be like lions? O keep your hearts, or you will lose, not only your own peace, but the credit of religion!

Means 4. Consider *how sweet a thing it is to a Christian to conquer his corruptions*, and carry away the spoils of them. "He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." Is there any contentment in venting a passion? how much more in mortifying it. When thou comest in a calm mood, or upon a death-bed, to review thy life,

how comfortable will it then be to reflect upon the conquests thou hast got, by the fear of God, over the evil propensities of thine own heart ! It was a memorable saying of Valentinian the emperor, when he came to die, " Among all my conquests there is but one that now comforts me ;" and being asked what that was, he answered, " I have overcome my worst enemy, my own haughty heart."

Means 5. Shame yourselves by setting before you *those eminent patterns that have been most excellent for meekness.* Above all, compare your spirit with the spirit of Christ: " Learn of me," saith he, " for I am meek and lowly." Christ was meek and lowly, but we are proud and passionate. It was the high commendation of Moses: " Now the man Moses was meek, above all the men of the earth ;" and this was the man that knew God face to face. It is said of Calvin and Ursin, that they both were of choleric natures, but yet had so learned the meekness of Christ as not to utter one word, under the greatest provocation, unbecoming religion. When I read what is related of some of the heathen, that never had the advantages we have—how the Pythagoreans, whatever feuds had been among them in the day, would hush all by sending to each other this message, " The sun is almost set ;" and that of Plato to his scholar, " I would beat thee if I were not angry"—when I read what lenity and tenderness Lycurgus showed

to an insolent fellow, that had struck out one of his eyes, I am ashamed to see how much Christians are outdone by these heathen ; who, by mere moral arguments and precepts, had thus tamed their passions. The dim light of nature could teach Seneca to say, "Anger will hurt a man more than the offence ; for there is a certain bound in the offence, but I know not how far mine anger will carry me." It is a shame that these men, who came so far behind us in means and advantages, should outstrip us in meekness and patience.

Means 6. Avoid all irritating occasions. "Grievous words stir up anger," saith Solomon. Do not only pray and resolve against it, but get as far as you can out of the way of it. It is true spiritual valor, to run as fast and as far as we can out of sin's way. If you can but avoid anger in its first rise, there is no great fear of it afterwards ; for it is not with this sin as it is with other sins : other sins grow to their full strength by degrees, their first motions are the weakest ; but this sin is born in its full strength, it is strongest at first ; withstand it then, and it falls before you.

IX. TEMPTATION. The ninth occasion requiring our greatest diligence, is the critical hour of temptation ; wherein Satan lays close siege to the fortroyal of a Christian's heart, and often surprises it for want of watchfulness. To keep the heart now is no less a mercy than a duty. Few Christians

are so well skilled in detecting the fallacies and retorting the arguments by which Satan tempts them to sin, as to come off safe in those encounters. "Watch and pray," saith our Lord, "lest ye enter into temptation." Even an eminent David, and a wise Solomon, have smarted for their carelessness at such a time as this. How then may a Christian, when strongly solicited by the devil to sin, keep his heart from yielding to the temptation? There are six special arguments by which Satan subtly insinuates the temptation; in all which I shall offer thee some help for the keeping of thy heart.

Argument 1. The first argument is drawn from *the pleasure of sin*. O, saith Satan, here is pleasure to be enjoyed! The temptation comes with a smiling countenance and charming voice. What, art thou so phlegmatic and dull a soul as not to feel the powerful charms of pleasure? Who can withhold himself from such delights? Thy heart may be kept from the danger of this temptation, by retorting this argument of pleasure upon the tempter; which is done in two ways:

(1.) Thou tellest me, Satan, that sin is pleasant. Be it so; but are the gripes of conscience and the flames of hell so too? Is it pleasant to feel the wounds and throbs of conscience? If so, why did Peter weep so bitterly? Mat. 26 : 75. If so, why did David cry out of broken bones? Psa. 51 : 8. I hear what thou sayest of the pleasure of sin; and

I have read what David hath said of the terrible effects of sin, in his Psalm "to bring to remembrance:" "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink, and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart." Psa. 38 : 2-8. Here I see the true face of sin. If I yield to thy temptation, I must either feel these pangs of conscience or the flames of hell.

(2.) What, talkest thou of the pleasure of sin, when, by experience, I know there is more true pleasure in the mortification, than can be in the commission of sin? O how sweet is it to please God, to obey conscience, to preserve inward peace; to be able to say, In this trial I have discovered the sincerity of my heart; now I know I fear the Lord; now I see that I truly hate sin. Hath sin any such delight as this? This will choke that temptation.

Argument 2. The second argument is drawn from *the secrecy* of sin. O, saith Satan, this sin will never disgrace thee abroad; none shall know

it. This argument may be retorted, and the heart secured, thus : Thou sayest, None shall know it ; but, Satan, canst thou find a place void of the divine presence for me to sin in ? Thus Job secured his heart from this temptation : “ Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps ? ” therefore he makes a covenant with his eyes. After the same manner Solomon teaches us to retort this temptation : “ And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger ? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.” What if I hide it from the eyes of all the world for the present ? I cannot hide it from God ; and the time is at hand when all the world shall know it too ; for the word assures me that what is now done in secret “ shall be proclaimed as upon the housetop.” Besides, is not my conscience as a thousand witnesses ? Do I owe no reverence to myself ? Could a heathen say, “ When thou art tempted to commit sin, fear thyself without any other witness ; ” and shall not I be afraid to sin before mine own conscience, which always hath a reproof in its mouth, or a pen in its hand to record my most secret actions ?

Argument 3. The third argument by which Satan tempteth to sin, is taken from *the gain and profit* arising out of it : Why so nice and scrupulous ? It is but to stretch conscience a little, and thou mayest make thyself rich ; now is thy oppor-

tunity. The heart may be kept from falling into this dangerous snare, by retorting the temptation thus: But "what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" O my soul, my precious soul, shall I hazard thee for all the good that is in this world? There is an immortal spirit dwelling in this fleshly tabernacle, of more value than all earthly things: a soul which must live to all eternity, when this world shall lie in ashes—a soul for which Jesus Christ shed his precious and invaluable blood. I was sent into this world to provide for this soul. God hath indeed also committed to me the care of my body; but, as one happily expresses it, with this difference: a master commits two things to a servant—the child, and the child's clothes. Will the master thank the servant if he plead, I have kept the clothes, but I have neglected the life of the child?

Argument 4. The fourth argument is drawn from *the smallness of the sin*. It is but a little one, a small matter, a trifle; who would stand upon such niceties? This argument may be retorted three ways: 1. But is the Majesty of heaven a little one too? If I commit this sin, I must offend and wrong a great God. Isa. 40: 15–17, 22. 2. Is there any little hell to torment little sinners in? Are not the least sinners there filled with the fulness of wrath? O there is great wrath treasured up for such as the

world counts little sinners! 3. The less the sin, the less the inducement to commit it. What, shall I break with God for a trifle; destroy my peace, wound my conscience, grieve the Spirit, and all this for nothing? O what madness is this!

Argument 5. A fifth argument is drawn from *the grace of God*, and hopes of pardon. Come, God will pass by this as an infirmity; he will not be extreme to mark it. But stay, my heart. 1. Where do I find a promise of mercy to presumptuous sinners? For involuntary surprisals, unavoidable and lamentable infirmities, there is indeed a pardon; but where is the promise to a daring sinner, that sins upon presumption of pardon? Pause a while, my soul, upon that scripture, Num. 15 : 27, 30 : “And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she-goat of the first year for a sin-offering.” “But the soul that doeth aught presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.” 2. If God be a God of so much mercy, how can I abuse so good a God? Shall I take so glorious an attribute as the mercy of God is, and abuse it unto sin? Shall I wrong him because he is good; or should not rather the goodness of God lead me to repentance? “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

Argument 6. Sometimes Satan encourages to sin from the *examples of good and holy men*: Thus and

thus they have sinned, and been restored ; therefore this may consist with grace, and thou be saved nevertheless. The danger of this temptation is avoided, and the heart secured, by retorting the argument these three ways : 1. Though good men may commit the same sin materially which I am tempted to do, yet, did ever any good man venture to sin upon such a ground and encouragement as this ? 2. Did God record these examples for my imitation, or for my warning ? Are they not set up as sea-marks, that I might avoid the rocks on which they split ? “ Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” 3. Am I willing to feel what they felt for sin ? Oh, I dare not follow them in the ways of sin, lest God should plunge me into the deeps of horror into which he cast them. By these considerations learn to keep your heart in the hour of temptation to sin.

X. SPIRITUAL DARKNESS. The tenth special season, requiring us to keep the heart with all diligence, is the time of spiritual darkness and doubting, when it is with the soul as it was with Paul in his dangerous voyage : neither sun, nor moon, nor star appears for many days ; when, by reason of the hiding of God’s face, the prevalency of corruption, and the feebleness of grace, the soul is even ready to give up all its hopes and comforts for lost ; to draw sad and desperate conclusions upon itself ; to call its

former comforts, vain delusions; its grace, hypocrisy: when the serene and clear heavens are overcast with dark clouds, yea, filled with thunders and horrible tempests; when the poor pensive soul sits down and weeps with this sad lamentation, "My hope is perished from the Lord." To keep the heart from sinking in such a day as this, is a matter of great difficulty. How then may the people of God, in dark and doubting seasons, keep their hearts from entertaining such sad conclusions about their state, as destroy their peace and unfit them for their duty?

There are two general heads to which the grounds of doubting our sincerity may be reduced: 1. From God's dealings with the soul in some extraordinary affliction, or some long and sad desertion; or 2. From the soul's departure from God: from its relapses into the same sins from which it hath formerly risen with shame and sorrow—from the sensible declining of its affections from God—from the excess of the affections towards creature-comforts and enjoyments—from its enlargements in public, and yet its straitenings in private duties—from some horrid suggestions of Satan, with which the soul is greatly perplexed—or from God's silence, and seeming denial of its long depending suits and prayers. These are the common grounds of those desponding conclusions.

Now, in order to the establishment and support

of the heart in this condition, it will be necessary, 1. That you be acquainted with some general truths which have a tendency to the settlement of a trembling and doubting soul; and 2. That you be rightly instructed about the forementioned particulars, which are the grounds of your doubting.

THE GENERAL TRUTHS requisite for poor doubting souls to be acquainted with, are these :

1. Every *appearance* of hypocrisy doth not presently prove the person in whom it is, to be a hypocrite. You must carefully distinguish between the appearance and the predominance of hypocrisy. There are remains of deceitfulness in the best hearts : David and Peter had sad experience of it; yet, the standing frame of their hearts being upright, it did not constitute them hypocrites.

2. We ought as well to hear what can be said *for us*, as against us. It is the sin of upright hearts sometimes to use an overrigid and merciless severity against themselves; they do not impartially consider the case of their own souls. It is, in this case, as Solomon speaks in another, "There is that maketh himself rich, and yet hath nothing; and there is that maketh himself poor, and yet hath great riches." It is the damning sin of the self-flattering hypocrite, to make his condition better than it is; and it is the sin and folly of some upright ones, to make their condition worse than indeed it is. Why should you be such an enemy to

your own peace? Why read over the evidences of God's love to your soul, as a man doth a book which he intends to confute? Why do you study to find evasions, to turn off those comforts which are due to you? It is said of Joseph, he was minded to put away his espoused Mary; not knowing that that holy thing which was conceived in her, was by the Holy Ghost: and this may be your case.

3. Many a saint hath charged and condemned himself, for that *which God will never charge him with nor condemn him for*. "Why hast thou hardened our heart from thy fear!" saith the church, Isa. 63: 17; and yet the verse before manifests that their hearts were not so hardened. Godly Bradford wrote himself a hypocrite, a painted sepulchre; yet doubtless God acquitted him of that charge.

4. Every thing which is a ground of *grief* to the people of God, is not a sufficient ground of *questioning their sincerity*. There are many more things to trouble you, than there are to stumble you. If upon every slip and falling through infirmity, you should call in question all that ever was wrought upon you, your life would be made up of doubtings and fears; you could never attain a settled peace, nor live the life of praise and thankfulness which the gospel enjoins.

5. The soul is *not at all times fit to pass judgment* upon its own condition. In the dark day of

desertion, when the soul is benighted, and in the stormy day of temptation when the soul is in commotion, it is utterly unfit to judge its state. These are rather seasons for watching and resisting, than for judging and determining. "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still."

6. Every breach of *peace* with God is not a fatal breach of *covenant* with God. The wife may have many weaknesses and failings, and often grieve and displease her husband, and yet in the main be faithful and truly love him. These failings may cause him to alter his deportment towards her, but not to withdraw his love or deny his relation: "Return, O backsliding Israel, for I am married unto you."

7. Whatever our sin or trouble be, it should rather drive us *to* God, than *from* God: "Pardon my sin, for it is great." Suppose it to be true that thou hast so and so sinned, that thou art thus long and sadly deserted, yet it is a false inference that therefore thou shouldst be discouraged, as if there were no help for thee in thy God.

When you have well digested these establishing truths, if the doubt still remain, then consider what may be replied to THE PARTICULAR GROUNDS OF THESE DOUBTS.

1. You doubt, and are ready to conclude, the Lord hath no regard or love for your soul, because of some *extraordinary affliction* which is come upon

you. But I would not have thy soul so to conclude, till thou be able satisfactorily to answer these three inquiries :

If great troubles and afflictions be marks of God's hatred, why should not impunity and constant prosperity be tokens of his love? For, of contrary things, there is a contrary reason and consequence. But is this so indeed? Or saith not the scripture quite otherwise? Prov. 1 : 32 : "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." So also Psa. 37 : 35.

Dare you draw the same conclusion upon all others that have been as much, yea, more afflicted than yourself? If this argument conclude against thee, then so it doth against every one in thy condition ; yea, the greater the affliction of any child of God hath been, the more strongly the argument concludes ; and then woe to David, Job, Heman, Paul, and all that have been afflicted as they were.

Had God exempted you only from those troubles which all his other people feel, would not that have been a greater ground of doubting to you than this? especially since the scripture saith, "If ye be without chastening, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." O how is our Father dishonored by his froward children! If he afflicts, then one cries, He loves me not. If he exempts from affliction, others question his love upon that ground. Surely you have other work to do under the rod than this.

2. Or do you rashly infer that the Lord hath no love for you, because *he hides his face* from you ; that your condition is desperate, because dark and uncomfortable ? Before you draw such rash conclusions, see what answer you can give to these four following inquiries :

If any action of God towards his people will bear a favorable, as well as a harsh and severe construction, why should not his people interpret it in the best sense ? And is not this such ? May he not have a design of love rather than of hatred, in this dispensation ? May he not depart for a season, and not for ever ? Yea, that he might not depart for ever ! You are not the first that have mistaken God's ends in desertion : " Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, my God hath forgotten me." Was it so indeed ? Nay, far otherwise. " Can a mother forget," etc.

Do you find upon your own spirit the marks of an absolute, total, and final desertion, that you are so apt to conclude yours to be such ? Do you find your heart inclined to forsake God ? Have you lost your conscientious tenderness in respect to sin ? If so, sad characters appear upon you indeed. But if, in this dark hour, you are as tender in respect to sin as ever ; as much resolved to cleave to God as ever—I cannot, I will not forsake God, let him do what he will with me : O no, I cannot. If your heart work thus, it can be but a partial, limited, and temporary desertion. By this he still keeps his

interest in your heart : a sure sign he will return and visit you again.

Are sense and feeling competent judges of God's actions and designs ? Or may a man safely rely upon their testimony, after so many discoveries of its fallibility ? Is it sound argument to reason thus : " If God had any love for my soul, if it were not quite gone, I should feel it now as well as in former times ; but I cannot feel it, therefore it is quite gone ? " The sun still keeps on his course in the heavens, even in dull and close weather, when you cannot see it ; and may it not be so with the love of God ? Read Isa. 50 : 10. May not I as well conclude in winter, when the flowers have hid their beautiful heads under ground, they are quite dead and gone, because I cannot find them in December where I saw them in May ?

Think you, the Lord cares not though he break his children's hearts and his own promise too ? Hath he no more regard to either ? If he return no more, look for the reasons in Isa. 57 : 16-19 ; Heb. 13 : 5.

Since then, from God's dealings with you, either in affliction or desertion, no such discouraging, heart-sinking conclusions can be inferred, let us see whether they may not be inferred from our unfaithfulness to God ; and here the principal grounds of doubting are such as these :

3. I have fallen again *into the same sin* from

which I have formerly risen with repentance and resolution ; therefore my sinning is habitual sinning, a spot that is not the spot of God's children. Hence the upright soul trembles ; upon this it is ready to affirm, that all its former humiliations for, and oppositions to sin, were but acts of hypocrisy. But stay, poor trembling heart.

If this be so, how comes it to pass that Christ put such a favorable construction upon the disciples' sleeping the third time, when he had as often reproved them for it ? And how is it that we find in Scripture so many promises made, referring not only to the first sins, but also to the backslidings of God's people ? Jer. 3 : 22 ; Hos. 14 : 4.

Are not your repentance and alarm renewed as often as your guilt is renewed ? Yea, the oftener you sin the more you are troubled. It is not so in customary sinning, the rise whereof Bernard excellently discovers : " When a man accustomed to good sinneth grievously, it seems insupportable ; yea, he seems to descend alive into hell. In process of time it seems not insupportable, but heavy. Next it becomes light ; his conscience smites but faintly, and he feels not its stripes. Then there is not only a total insensibility to it, but that which was bitter and displeasing is now become in some degree sweet and pleasing. Then it is turned into custom, and not only pleases, but daily pleases. And at length, custom is turned into nature ; he cannot be pulled

away from it, but defends and pleads for it." This is customary or habitual sinning ; this is the way of the wicked ; but quite the contrary is your condition.

Are you sure, from scripture grounds, that good men may not relapse again and again into the same sin ? It is true, that as for gross sins, they do not usually relapse into them. David committed adultery no more ; Paul persecuted the church no more ; Peter denied Christ no more : but I speak of ordinary infirmities. Job's friends were good men, yet, saith he, " These ten times have ye reproached me." No such conclusions, therefore, necessarily follow from this ground of doubting.

4. Another ground is, the *declining and withering of our affections to spiritual things*. O, saith the upright soul, if ever I had been planted a right seed, I should have been as a green olive-tree in the house of my God ; but my branches wither, therefore my root is naught. But stay :

May you not be mistaken about the decay of grace, and the fading of your affections ? What if they are not so quick and ravishing as at first ? May not that be recompensed in the spirituality and solidity of them now ? " I pray God your love may abound more and more in all judgment." It may be more solid, though not so fervent. Or do you not mistake, by looking forward to what you would be, rather than backward to what you once

were? It is a good note of Ames: "We discern the growth of grace as the growth of plants, which we perceive rather to have grown than to grow."

But grant it be indeed as you affirm, must it needs follow that the root of the matter is not in you? David's last ways are distinguished from his first, 2 Chron. 17 : 3 ; and yet both first and last, he was a holy man. The church of Ephesus is re-proved by Christ for leaving her first love, and yet she was a golden candlestick. There were many precious saints in that church. Rev. 2 : 2-4.

5. Another ground of these sad conclusions is the *excess of our affections to some creature-enjoyments*. I fear I love the creature more than God ; and if so, my love is but hypocritical. I sometimes feel stronger and more sensible motions of my heart to some earthly comforts, than I do to heavenly objects ; therefore, my soul is not upright in me. But stay, O soul :

May not a man love God more solidly and strongly than the creature, and yet his affections to the creature be sometimes moved more violently and sensibly than towards God? As rooted malice argues a stronger hatred than a sudden though more violent passion, so we must measure our love, not by a violent motion of it now and then, but by the depth of the root and the constancy of its actings. Because David was so passionately moved for Absalom, Joab concludes that if he had lived and all

the people died, "it would have pleased him well." But that was argued more like a soldier than a logician.

If you indeed love the creature for itself, if you make it your end and religion but a means, then the conclusion is rightly drawn upon you; but if you love the creature in reference to God, and see nothing in it separated from him, though sometimes your affections offend in the excess, this is consistent with sincere love to God. To love the creature inordinately, that is, to put it in God's room, and make it your end, this is the love of a carnal heart; to love it immoderately, that is, to let out more affection to it than we ought, is sometimes the sin of the best hearts.

Have not many souls feared as you do, that when Christ and creatures should stand as competitors in some eminent trial, they should forsake Christ rather than the creature; and yet, when brought to that dilemma, been able to cast all the world at their feet for Christ? Many of the martyrs had such fears, and thus they were satisfied. The prevalency of love is best seen at parting; there may be more love to Christ in thy soul than thou art now aware of, and if God bring thee to such a pinch, thou mayest see it.

6. A further ground of these sad conclusions is, that *we find our hearts sometimes more straitened in private than in public duties.* Oh, if my soul

were sincere, its actings in duty would be uniform ; I fear I am but a Pharisee upon this ground. It is sad, indeed, we should at any time find our hearts straitened in private ; but,

Do not all your enlargements in duty, whether public or private, depend upon the Spirit, who is the Lord of influences ; and according as he gives out or holds back these influences, art thou not enlarged or straitened ? And what if, sometimes, he please to give that in a public, which he withholds in a private duty—as long as thy soul is satisfied in neither, without communion with God, and the straitness of thy heart is indeed its burden—doth that argue thee to be a hypocrite ?

Dost thou not make conscience of private duties, and set thyself as before the Lord in them ? Indeed, if thou live in the constant neglect or careless performance of them—if thou art scrupulous about public and careless about private duties, that would be a sad sign. But when you have conscientiously performed, and often met with God in them, it will not follow that you are insincere because that communion is sometimes interrupted. Besides,

May there not be something at some times in a public, which is wanting in a private duty, to raise and assist thine affections ? God may sometimes make use of the melting affections of them with whom thou hearest or prayest, as instruments to move thy affections ; this advantage is wanting in

private: therefore from this ground, the case so standing, no such inference can be drawn.

7. Another ground is from those *horrid suggestions of Satan*, with which the soul is greatly perplexed. By these I may see what a heart I have. Can grace be where those are? Yes; grace may be where such thoughts are, though not where they are lodged and consented to. Dost thou cry out under the burden? Dost thou enter thy protest in heaven against them, and strive to keep up holy and reverend thoughts to God? Then are these suggestions involuntary, and no evidence against thy good estate with God.

8. The last ground of these sad conclusions is, *the Lord's long silence*, and seeming denial of our long-depending suits and prayers. Oh, if God had any regard to my soul, he would have heard my cries before now; but I have no answer from him, and therefore no interest in him. But stay, doubting soul:

Have not many saints stumbled upon this stone before thee? "I said, in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplication." So the church: "Thou coverest thyself with a cloud, that our prayers shall not pass through." "Then said I, I am cast out of thy sight." And may not you be mistaken in this matter as well as they?

Though God's abhorring and finally rejecting

prayer be an argument of his abhorring the person that prays, yet dare we conclude so from a mere suspension of the answer? God may bear long with "his own elect, which cry day and night unto him." Luke 18 : 7.

Can you deny that there are some signs appearing in your soul, even while God suspends his answer, that show your prayers are not rejected by him? As, 1. Though no answer come, yet you are still resolved to wait. You dare not say, as that profane king of Israel did, "This evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for him any longer?" 2 Kings, 6 : 33. 2. You can clear and justify God still, and lay the reason and cause of his silence upon yourself. So did David: "O my God, I cry in the daytime, and thou hearest not; and in the night, and am not silent. But thou art holy." 3. The suspension of God's answer makes you inquisitive into your own heart. What evils are there that obstruct your prayers? So the church, Lam. 3 : 8, "He shutteth out my prayer." And the effect of this you see, verse 40 : "Let us search and try our ways." Well, then, neither from hence may you conclude that God hath no love for your soul.

Thus I have shown you how to keep your hearts, in a dark and doubting season, from these desperate conclusions of unbelief. God forbid that any false heart should encourage itself from these things. It

is our unhappiness, when we give saints and sinners their proper portions, that each of them are so prone to take up the other's part.

XI. SUFFERINGS FOR RELIGION. The eleventh special season, calling for this diligence to keep your heart, is when sufferings for religion come to a height. "All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you ; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended." When sufferings for religion grow hot, then blessed is he that is not offended in Christ. Troubles are at a height when a man's nearest friends and relations forsake and leave him, Micah 7 : 5, 6 ; 2 Tim. 4 : 16 ; when it comes to resisting unto blood, Heb. 12 : 4 ; when temptations are presented to us in our sufferings, Heb. 11 : 37 ; when persons eminent for profession turn aside, and desert the cause of Christ, 2 Tim. 2 : 18 ; when God hides his face in a suffering hour, Jer. 17 : 17 ; and when Satan falls upon us with strong temptations, to question the grounds of our sufferings or the soul's interest in Christ. At such times it is hard to keep the heart from turning back, and the steps from declining God's ways. How then may the heart be kept from relapsing under the greatest sufferings for religion ? If the bitterness of sufferings at any time cause thy soul to dislike the way of God, and indulge thoughts of forsaking it, stay thy heart un-

der that temptation, by solemnly propounding to it these eight questions :

Question 1. Can I consent to *pour reproach and dishonor upon Christ and religion*, by deserting him at such a time as this? This will proclaim to all the world, that how much soever I have boasted of the promises, yet, when it comes to the trial, I dare hazard nothing upon the credit of them; and how will this open the mouths of Christ's enemies to blaspheme? O better had I never been born, than that worthy name should be blasphemed through me. Shall I furnish the triumphs of the uncircumcised? Shall I make mirth in hell? O, if I did but value the name of Christ as much as many a wicked man values his own name, I could never endure to see it exposed to such contempt. Will proud dust and ashes venture death, yea, hell, rather than a blot upon their names, and shall I venture nothing to save the honor and reputation of Christ?

Question 2. *Dare I violate my conscience to save my flesh?* Who shall comfort me when conscience wounds me? What comfort is there in life, liberty, or friends, when peace is taken away from the inner man? When Constantius threatened to cut off Samosatenus' right hand, if he would not subscribe somewhat that was against his conscience, he held up both his hands to the messenger that was sent, saying, "He shall cut off both rather than I will

do it: farewell all peace, joy, and comfort, from that day forward." "Had Zimri peace, that slew his master?" said Jezebel. So say I here, Had Judas peace? Had Spira peace? And shall you have peace, if you tread in their steps? O consider what you do.

Question 3. Is not the *public interest of Christ and religion infinitely more than any private interest of my own*? It is related of Terentius, captain to the emperor Adrian, that he once presented a petition to the emperor that the Christians might have a temple by themselves, to worship God apart from the Arians. The emperor tore his petition and threw it away, bidding him ask something for himself and it should be granted; but he modestly gathered up the pieces of his petition again, and told him, if he could not be heard in God's cause, he would never ask any thing for himself. Oh, if we had more regard for the cause of the Redeemer, we should not have such cowardly spirits.

Question 4. Did JESUS CHRIST serve me so, when for my sake he exposed himself to far greater sufferings than can be before me? His sufferings were great indeed; he suffered from all hands, in all his offices, in every member, not only in his body but in his soul; yea, the sufferings of his soul were the very soul of his sufferings—witness the bloody sweat in the garden, witness the heart-melting and heaven-rending outcry upon the cross, "My

God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And yet he flinched not: "He endured the cross, despising the shame." Alas, what are my sufferings compared with Christ's? He hath drank up all that vinegar and gall that would make my sufferings bitter. When one of the martyrs was asked why he was so cheerful at his death, "O," said he, "it is because the soul of Christ was so heavy at his death." Did Christ bear such a burden for me, with unbroken patience and constancy; and shall I shrink back from momentary and light afflictions for him?

Question 5. Is not *eternal life* worth the suffering of a moment's pain? If I suffer with him, I shall reign with him. O how will men venture life and limb for a fading crown, swim through seas of blood to a throne; and will I venture nothing, suffer nothing for the "crown of glory that fadeth not away?" My dog will follow my horse's heels from morning to night, take many a weary step through mire and dirt, rather than leave me, though at night all he gets by it is but bones and blows. If my soul had any true greatness, any spark of generosity in it, how would it despise the sufferings of the way for the glory of the end. How would it break down all difficulties before it, while, by an eye of faith, it sees "the Forerunner" who is already entered, standing, as it were, upon the walls of heaven, with the crown in his hand, say-

ing, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things." Come on then, my soul, come on; there is eternal life laid up for them that "by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honor, and immortality."

Question 6. Can I so easily cast off *the society and company of the saints*, and give the right hand of fellowship to the wicked? How can I part with such lovely companions as these have been? How often have I benefited by their counsels; how often refreshed, warmed, and quickened by their company; how often have I fasted and prayed with them. What sweet counsel have I taken with them, and gone to the house of God in company. And shall I now shake hands with them, and say, Farewell, all ye saints, for ever; I shall never be among you more: come drunkards, blasphemers, persecutors, you shall be my everlasting companions? O rather let my body and soul be rent asunder, than that ever I should say thus to the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight.

Question 7. Have I seriously considered the *terrible scripture threatenings* against backsliders? O my heart, darest thou turn back upon the very point of such threatenings as these? "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord: for he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh," Jer. 17: 5, 6; that is, the curse of God

shall wither him root and branch. And, "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Heb. 10 : 26, 27. And again, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him ;" as if he should say, Take him, world, take him, devil, for your own ; I have no delight in him. O who dare draw back, when God has hedged up the way with such terrible threats as these ?

Question 8. Can I look Christ in the face in the day of judgment, if I desert him now ? "Who-soever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Yet a little while, and you shall see the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. The last trump shall sound, the dead both small and great, even all that sleep in the dust, shall awake and come before that great white throne, on which Christ shall sit on that great day. And now, do but imagine thou seest the trembling knees and quivering lips of guilty sinners. Imagine thou hearest the dreadful sentence of the Judge upon them, "Depart, ye cursed ;" and then a cry—the

weeping, wailing, and wringing of hands, that there shall be. Wouldst thou now desert Christ, to protract a poor miserable life upon earth? If the word of God be true, if the sayings of Christ be sealed and faithful, this shall be the portion of the apostate. It is an easy thing to stop the mouth of conscience now, but will it be easy to stop the mouth of the Judge then? Thus keep thy heart, that it depart not from the living God.

XII. SICKNESS AND DEATH. The twelfth season of looking diligently to our hearts, and keeping them with greatest care, is the time of sickness. When a child of God draws nigh to eternity, when there are but a few sands more in his glass to run down, Satan busily bestirs himself. Of him it may be said, as of the natural serpent, he is never seen at his full length till dying. And now his great design, since he cannot win the soul from God, is to discourage and make it unwilling to go to God: though the gracious soul, with Jacob, should then rouse up itself upon a dying-bed, and rejoice that the marriage-day of the Lamb is now almost come; though it should then say, with dying Augustine, "I despise life to be with Christ." Or as dying Milius, when one asked him whether he were willing to die, "O," said he, "let him be unwilling to die, who is unwilling to go to Christ." But O, what shrinking from death, what loathness to depart may sometimes, indeed too frequently, be ob-

served in the people of God. How loath are some of them to take death by the cold hand. If such a liberty were indulged to us, not to die till we ourselves should choose, when should we say with St. Paul, "I desire to depart and be with Christ?" How then may the people of God, in time of sickness, get their hearts loose from all earthly engagements, and persuade them into a willingness to die? The arguments which I shall urge to this end are these.

Argument 1. The harmlessness of death to the people of God. Though it keeps its dart, it hath lost its sting. A saint may "play upon the hole of the asp, and put his hand into the cockatrice's den." Isa. 11 : 8. Death is the cockatrice, or asp; the grave is his den : a saint need not fear to put his hand boldly into it ; it hath left and lost its sting in the sides of Christ : "O death, where is thy sting?" Why art thou afraid, O saint, that this sickness may be thy death, as long as thou knowest that the death of Christ is the death of death? Indeed, if thou didst die in thy sins, as John 8 : 21 ; if death as a king did reign over thee, Rom. 5 : 14 ; if it could feed upon thee, as the lion doth upon the prey he hath taken, as Psalm 49 : 14, "If hell followed the pale horse;" then thou mightest well startle and shrink back from it ; but when God hath put away thy sins from thee "as far as the east is from the west," as long as there is no other

evil left in death for thee to encounter but bodily pain, as long as the Scriptures represent it to thee as the putting off thy clothes and lying down to sleep upon thy bed, why shouldst thou be afraid?

Argument 2. Thy heart may be kept from shrinking back at such a time as this, by considering *the necessity of death* in order to the full fruition of God. Whether thou art willing to die or not, I assure thee there is no other way to obtain the full satisfaction of thy soul and complete its happiness; till the hand of death do thee the kind office to draw aside the curtain of thy flesh, thy soul cannot see God. This animal life stands between him and thee: "While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." Thy body must be refined, and cast into a new mould, else that new wine of heavenly glory would break it. Paul, in his highest rapture, 2 Cor. 12:4, when he heard things unutterable, was then but as a stander-by, a looker-on—not admitted into the company as one of them. But as the angels are in our assemblies, so was Paul in that glorious assembly above, and no otherwise; and yet even for this, he must, as it were, be taken out of the body, unclothed for a little time, to have a glimpse of that glory, and then clothed again. O, then, who would not be willing to die for a full sight and enjoyment of God? Methinks thy soul should look and sigh like a prisoner, through the grates of this mortality: "O that I

had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest." Most men need patience to die ; but a saint who understands what death admits him to; should rather need patience to live. Methinks he should often look out and listen on a death-bed for his Lord's coming ; and when he receives the news of his approaching change, should say, " The voice of my beloved ! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills."

Argument 3. Another argument persuading to this willingness, is *the immediate succession of a more excellent and glorious life.* It is but a wink, and you shall see God. Your happiness shall not be deferred till the resurrection, but as soon as the body is dead the gracious soul is swallowed up in life. When once you have loosed from this shore, in a few moments your soul will be wafted over, upon the wings of angels, to the other shore of a glorious eternity. " I desire to depart, and be with Christ." Did the soul and body die together, or did they sleep till the resurrection, as others have groundlessly fancied, it had been a madness for Paul to desire a dissolution for the enjoyment of Christ ; for, if this were so, he enjoyed more of Christ while his soul dwelt in its fleshly tabernacle, than he would out of it.

There are but two ways of the soul's living, known in Scripture ; namely, the life of *faith*, and the life of *vision*. 2 Cor. 5 : 7. These two divide

all time, both present and future, between them. 1 Cor. 13 : 12. If, when faith fails, sight should not immediately succeed, what would become of the unbodied soul? But, blessed be God, this great heart-establishing truth is evidently revealed in Scripture. Luke 23 : 43. You have Christ's promise, "I will come again and receive you unto myself." John 14 : 3. O what a change will a few moments make in your condition. Rouse up, dying saint! When thy soul is come out a little further, when it shall stand like Abraham at its tent-door, the angels of God shall soon be with it. The souls of the elect are, as it were, put out to the angels to nurse, and when they die, these angels carry them home again to their Father's house. If an angel were caused to fly swiftly, to bring a saint the answer of his prayer, Dan. 9 : 21, how much more will the angels come post from heaven, to receive and transfer the praying soul itself!

Argument 4. Further, it may much conduce to thy willingness to die, to consider that by death *God oftentimes hides his people out of the way of all temptations and troubles upon earth.* "Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." It is God's usual way, when some extraordinary calamities are coming upon the world, to set his people out of harm's way beforehand: "Merciful men are taken away from the evil to come." Isa. 57 : 1. So Micah 7 : 1, 2 : when such

an evil time comes as is there described, that "they all lie in wait for blood, and every man hunts his brother with a net," God by an act of favor houses his people beforehand. Dost thou know what evil may soon be in the earth which thou art so loath to leave? Thy God removes thee for thy great advantage: thou art discharged by death and called off the field; other poor saints must stand, and endure a great fight of afflictions. It is observed that Methuselah died the very year before the flood; Augustine a little before the sacking of Hippo; Pareus just before the taking of Heidelburgh. Luther observes that all the apostles died before the destruction of Jerusalem; and Luther himself died before the wars broke out in Germany. It may be the Lord sees that thy tender heart cannot endure to see the misery, or bear the temptations, that are coming, and therefore will now gather thee to thy grave in peace; and yet wilt thou cry, O spare me a little longer?

Argument 5. If thy soul yet hang back, consider *the great advantage* you will have by death, above all that you ever enjoyed on earth, both as to your communion with God, and your communion with saints.

As to your communion with *God*. The time of perfecting that is now come. Thy soul shall shortly stand before the face of God, and have the immediate emanations and beamings forth of his glory

upon it. Here thy soul is remote from God ; the beams of his glory strike it but obliquely and feebly ; but shortly it will be under the line, and there the sun shall stand still as it did in Gibeon ; there shall be no cloudings nor declinings of it. O how should this fill thy soul with desires of being unclothed.

As for the enjoyment of *saints* : here indeed we have fellowship with his children ; but that fellowship is so dissweetened by remaining corruptions, that there is no full satisfaction in it. As it is the greatest plague that can befall a hypocrite to live in a pure church, so it is the greatest vexation to the spirit of a saint to live in a corrupt and disordered church. But when death hath admitted you into that glorious assembly of “ the spirits of just men made perfect,” you shall have the desire of your heart. O what discords, jarrings, censurings, are here ; what perfect blessed harmony there ! In heaven each saint loves another as himself ; they are altogether lovely. O my soul, haste thee away from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of Bether, from divided saints, to those mountains of myrrh and hills of frankincense. Thou art now going unto thine own people, as the apostle’s phrase imports. 2 Cor. 5 : 8.

Argument 6. If all this will not do, consider what *heavy burdens* death will ease thy shoulders of. “ In this tabernacle we groan, being burdened.”
1. With bodily distempers. How true do we find

the saying of Theophrastus, "The soul pays a dear rent for the tenement it now lives in!" But glorified bodies are clogged with no indispositions: death is the best physician; it will cure thee of all diseases at once. 2. With the indwelling of sin. This makes us groan from the very heart: "but he that is dead is freed from sin." Hath justification destroyed sin's damning power, and sanctification its reigning power? so glorification destroys its very being and existence. 3. We groan under temptations here; but as soon as we are out of the body, we are out of the reach of temptation. When once thou art in heaven, thou mayest say, Now, Satan, I am where thou canst not come. For as the damned in hell are so fixed in sin and misery that their condition cannot be altered, so glorified saints are so fixed in holiness and glory that they cannot be shaken. 4. Here we groan under various troubles and afflictions; but then the days of our mourning are ended; God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. O then let us haste away, that we may be at rest.

Argument 7. If still thou linger, like Lot in Sodom, then examine all the *pleas and pretences* for a longer time on earth. Why art thou unwilling to die?

Objection 1. Oh, I have many relations in the world; I know not what will become of them when I am gone.

Answer. If thou art troubled about their bodies and outward condition, why should not God's word satisfy thee? "Leave thy fatherless children to me, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me." Luther, in his last will and testament, hath this expression: "Lord, thou hast given me wife and children; I have nothing to leave them, but I commit them unto thee. O Father of the fatherless and judge of widows, nourish, keep, and teach them!" Or, art thou troubled for their souls? Thou canst not convert them if thou shouldst live; and God can make thy prayer and counsels to live and bless them when thou art dead.

Objection 2. I would fain live to do God more service in the world.

Answer. Well; but if he have no more service for thee to do here, why shouldst thou not say, with David, "If he have no delight to use me any further, here am I; let him do what seemeth him good." In this world thou hast no more to do; but he is calling thee to a higher service and employment in heaven; and what thou wouldst do for him here, he can accomplish by other hands.

Objection 3. I am not yet fully ready; I am not as a bride completely adorned for the Bridegroom.

Answer. Thy justification is complete already, though thy sanctification be not so. And the way to make it so is to die; for till then it will have its defects and wants.

Objection 4. O, but I want assurance. If I had that, I could die presently.

Answer. Yea, there it sticks indeed. But then consider that a hearty willingness to leave all the world, to be freed from sin and be with God, is the way to that desired assurance. No carnal person was ever willing to die upon this ground.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUBJECT APPLIED.

HAVING thus finished those cases which so nearly concern the people of God in the several conditions of their life, and taught them how to keep their hearts in all, I shall next apply the whole by way of warning, of exhortation, of direction, and of consolation.

I. Let these weighty considerations serve for our WARNING. You have seen that the keeping of the heart is the great work of a Christian, in which the very soul and life of religion consists, and without which all other duties are of no value with God. Hence then I shall infer, to the consternation of hypocrites and formal professors,

1. That the pains and labors of many persons in religion, are but labor and pains to no purpose, such as will never turn to account. Many great services have been performed, many glorious works are wrought by men, which yet are utterly rejected by God, and shall never stand upon record in order to an eternal acceptation, because they took no heed to keep their hearts with God in those duties. This is that fatal rock upon which thousands of vain professors have split eternally: they were exact about the externals of religion, but regardless of

their hearts. O, how many hours have some professors spent in hearing, praying, reading, conferring, and yet, as to the main end of religion, they might as well have sat still and done nothing; for all this signifies nothing—the great work, I mean heart-work, being all the while neglected. Tell me, thou vain professor, when didst thou shed a tear for the deadness, hardness, unbelief, or earthliness of thy heart? Thinkest thou such an easy religion can save thee? If so, we may invert Christ's words, and say, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to life; and many there be that go in thereat." Hear me, thou self-deluding hypocrite—thou that hast put off God with heartless duties—thou that hast acted in religion as if thou hadst been blessing an idol, that could not search thy heart—thou that hast offered to God but the skin of the sacrifice, not the marrow and fat of it—how wilt thou abide the coming of the Lord? How wilt thou hold up thy head before him, when he shall say, O thou dissembling, false-hearted man, how couldst thou profess religion? With what face couldst thou so often tell me thou lovedst me, when thou knewest all the while, in thine own conscience, that thy heart was not with me. O tremble to think what a fearful judgment it is to be given over to a heedless and careless heart; and then to have religious duties, like a child's rattle, to quiet and still the conscience.

2. Hence also infer, *for the humiliation even of upright hearts*, that unless the people of God spend more time and pains about their hearts than they ordinarily do, they are never like to do God much service, or be owners of much comfort in this world. I may say of the Christian that is remiss and careless in keeping his heart, as Jacob said of Reuben, "Thou shalt not excel." It grieves me to see how many Christians there are, that go up and down dejected and complaining, that live at a poor, low rate both of service and comfort. And how can they expect it should be otherwise, as long as they live at such a careless rate? O how little of their time is spent in the closet, in searching, humbling, and quickening their hearts.

You say your hearts are dead; and do you wonder they are so, as long as you keep them not with the Fountain of life? If your bodies had been dieted as your souls have been, they would have been dead too. Never expect better hearts till you take more pains with them; he that will not have the *sweat*, must not expect the *sweet* of religion. O Christians, I fear your zeal and strength have run in the wrong channel. I fear most of us may take up the church's complaint: "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Two things have eaten up the time and strength of the professors of this generation, and sadly diverted them from heart-work.

(1.) *Fruitless controversies* started by Satan, I doubt not for the very purpose of taking us off from practical godliness; to make us puzzle our heads when we should be searching our hearts. O how little have we minded the saying of the apostle, "It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats"—that is, with disputes and controversies about meats—"which have not profited them that have been occupied therein." O how much better is it to see men *live exactly*, than to hear them *dispute subtly*. These unfruitful questions, how have they rended the churches, wasted time and spirits, and called Christians off from their main business, from looking to their own vineyard. What think ye, sirs? Had it not been better if the questions agitated among the people of God, of late days, had been such as these: How shall a man distinguish the special from the common operations of the Spirit? How may a soul discern its first declinings from God? How may a backsliding Christian recover his first love? How may the heart be preserved from unseasonable thoughts in duty? How may a bosom-sin be discovered and mortified? Would not this have tended more to the credit of religion, and the comfort of your souls? O, it is time to repent and be ashamed of this folly. When I read what Suarez, a papist, said, who wrote many volumes of disputations—that he prized the time he set apart for the searching and

examining of his heart in reference to God, above all the time that ever he spent in other studies—I am ashamed to find the professors of this age yet insensible of their folly. Shall the conscience of a Suarez feel a relenting pang for strength and time so ill employed, and shall not yours? This is what your ministers long since warned you of. Your spiritual nurses were afraid of the rickets, when they saw your heads only grow, and your hearts wither. O when will God beat our swords into ploughshares; I mean, our disputes and contentions into practical godliness?

(2.) Another cause of neglecting our hearts, hath been *earthly incumbrances*. The heads and hearts of many have been filled with such a crowd and noise of worldly business, that they have sadly and sensibly declined and withered in their zeal, love, and delight in God—in their heavenly, serious, and profitable way of conversing with man. O how hath this wilderness entangled us; our discourses and conferences, nay, our very prayers and religious duties have a savor of it. We have had so much work without doors, that we have been able to do but little within. “O it is sad,” says a holy man, “to think how many precious opportunities I have lost, how many sweet motions and admonitions of the Spirit I have passed over unfruitfully, and made the Lord to speak in vain. In the secret influences of his Spirit, the Lord hath called upon me, but my

worldly thoughts did still lodge within me, and there was no place within my heart for 'such calls of God.'" Surely there is a way of enjoying God, even in our worldly employments. God would never have put us upon them to our loss. Enoch walked with God, but did not retire and separate himself from the things of this life: and the angels that are employed by Christ in the things of this world are finite creatures, and cannot be in two places at once, yet they lose nothing of the beatific vision all the time of their administration; for "their angels," even while employed for them, "behold the face of their Father which is in heaven." We need not lose our visions by our employments, if the fault were not our own. Alas, that ever Christians, who stand at the door of eternity, and have more work upon their hands than this poor moment of interposing time is sufficient for, should yet be filling both their heads and hearts with trifles.

(3.) Hence also, I infer, *for the awakening of all*, that if the keeping of the heart be the great work of a Christian, then there are but few real Christians in the world. Indeed, if every one that hath learned the dialect of Christianity, and can talk like a saint; if every one that hath gifts and parts, and without the special assisting presence of the Spirit, can preach, pray, or discourse like a Christian: in a word, if all such as associate themselves

with the people of God, and come to ordinances, may pass for Christians, the number then is great. But, alas, to what a small number will they shrink, if you judge them by this Bible rule! How few are there that make conscience of keeping their hearts, watching their thoughts, and judging their motives! O there are but few closet-men among professors! It is far easier for men to be reconciled to any other duties in religion than to these. The profane part of the world will not so much as touch the outside of religious duties, much less engage in this; and for the hypocrite, though he be attentive to externals, yet you can never persuade him to this inward work, this difficult work, to which there is no inducement from human applause—this work, that would quickly discover what the hypocrite cares not to know; so that, by a general consent, this heart-work is left to the hands of a few, I tremble to think how few.

II. The subject furnishes matter for earnest EXHORTATION. If the keeping of the heart be so important a business; if such choice advantages are gained thereby; if so many dear and precious interests are wrapt up in it, then let me call upon the people of God everywhere to fall close to this work. O study your hearts, watch your hearts, keep your hearts. Away with fruitless controversies, and all idle questions; away with empty names and

vain shows; away with unprofitable discourse, and bold censures of others. Turn in upon yourselves; get into your closet, and now resolve to dwell there. You have been strangers to this work too long, you have trifled about the borders of religion too long; this world hath detained you from your great work too long: will you now resolve to look better to your hearts? Will you haste and come out of the crowds of business, and clamors of the world, and retire yourselves more than you have done? O that this day you would resolve upon it!

Reader, methinks I should prevail with thee. All that I beg for is but this, that thou wouldst step aside a little oftener to talk with God and thine own heart; that thou wouldst not suffer every trifle to divert thee; that thou wouldst keep a more true and faithful account of thy thoughts and affections; that thou wouldst but seriously demand of thine own heart, at least every evening, O my heart, where hast thou been to-day? If all that hath been said, by way of inducement, be not enough, I have yet more motives to offer you.

Motive 1. The studying, observing, and diligent keeping of your own heart, will marvellously *help your understanding of the deep mysteries of religion*. An honest, well-experienced heart, is a singular help to a weak head: such a heart will serve you instead of a commentary upon a great part of the Scriptures. By this means you shall far better

understand the things of God, than the learned rabbies and profound doctors—if graceless and inexperienced—ever did ; you shall not only have a more clear, but a more sweet perception and relish of them. A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, the troubles and comforts of conscience, the sweetness of communion with God, that never felt the efficacy and sweet impression of these things upon his own spirit. But O how dark and dry are these notions, compared with his in whose heart they have been acted ! When such a man reads David’s psalms, or Paul’s epistles, there he finds his own objections made and answered. O, saith he, these holy men speak my very heart ; their doubts were mine, their troubles mine, and their experiences mine. Chrysostom, speaking to his people of Antioch about some choice experiences, uses this expression : “ Those that are initiated know what I say ; experience is the best schoolmaster.” O then, study your hearts, keep your hearts.

Motive 2. The study and observation of your own heart will be an antidote to you against *the dangerous and infecting errors* of the times and places you live in. What think you is the reason that so many professors of religion have departed from the faith, giving heed to fables ; that so many thousands have been led away by the error of the wicked ; that those who have sown corrupt doc-

trine, have had such plentiful harvests among us, but because they have met with a company of empty, notional professors, that never knew what belongs to practical godliness and the study of their own hearts? If professors did but diligently study, search, and watch their own hearts, they would have that steadfastness of their own that Peter speaks of, 2 Pet. 3 : 17 ; and this would ballast and settle them, Heb. 13 : 9. Suppose a subtle Papist should talk to such of the dignity and merit of good works, could he ever work the persuasion of it into the heart that is conscious to itself of so much darkness, deadness, distraction, and unbelief attending its best duties? What a man hath felt and tasted, one cannot beat him off from by argument.

Motive 3. Your care and diligence in keeping your heart will prove *one of the best evidences of your sincerity.* I know no external act of religion that distinguishes the sound from the unsound professor. It is wonderful to consider how far hypocrites go in all external duties, how plausibly they can order the outward man, hiding all their indecencies from the observation of the world. But then, they take no heed to their hearts; they are not in secret, what they appear to be in public; and before this trial no hypocrite can stand. It is confessed, they may in a fit of terror, under a pang upon a death-bed, cry out of the wickedness of their hearts; but alas, there is no heed to be given to

these extorted complaints : no credit is to be given to the testimony of one upon the rack, because it may be supposed that the extremity of the torture may make him say any thing to be eased. But if self-jealousy, care, and watchfulness be the daily working and frame of thy heart, it strongly argues your sincerity ; for what but the sense of a divine eye, what but the real hatred of sin as sin, could put thee upon heartily performing those sacred duties which lie out of the observation of all creatures ? If, then, it be a desirable thing in thine eyes to have a fair testimony of thine integrity, and to know of a truth that thou fearest God, then study thy heart, watch thy heart, keep thy heart.

Motive 4. How fruitful, sweet, and comfortable would all ordinances and duties be to us, if our hearts were better kept ! Oh what precious communion might you have with God every time you approach him, if your heart were but in frame ! You might then say with David, “ My meditation of him shall be sweet.” That which makes us lose so much of our comfort in ordinances and more secret duties, is the indisposition of the heart. A Christian, whose heart is in a good frame, gets the start of all others that join him in duty. They strive hard to get up their hearts to God—now trying this means, and then that, to quicken and affect them, and sometimes go away as bad as they came. Sometimes the duty is almost ended before their hearts begin

to stir or feel any warmth, quickening, or power from it ; but all this while the prepared heart is at its work : this is he that ordinarily gets the first sight of Christ in a sermon, the first seal from Christ in a sacrament, the first kiss from Christ in secret prayer. I tell you, and I tell you but what I have felt, that prayers and sermons would appear to you other manner of things than they do, did you but bring better ordered hearts to them. You would not go away dejected and drooping : O this hath been a lost day, a lost duty to me. If you had not lost your heart, it had not been so. If, then, the comfort of ordinances be sweet, look to your heart, keep your heart.

Motive 5. Acquaintance with your own hearts would be a *fountain of matter to you in prayer.* A man that is diligent in heart-work, and knows the state of his own soul, will have a fountainfulness of matter to supply him richly in all his addresses to God. His tongue shall not falter and make pause for want of matter : “ My heart is inditing a good matter ;” “ My tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.” If thou hast kept and faithfully studied thine own heart, it will be with thee as Job speaks in another case, “ like bottles full of new wine, that want vent, which are ready to burst.” As holy matter flows plentifully, so it flows more feelingly and sweetly from such a heart. When a heart-experienced Christian is mourning before God over some

special heart-corruption, wrestling with God for the supply of some special inward want, he speaks not as men do that have learned to pray by rote : their confessions and petitions are squeezed out ; his drop freely, like pure honey from the comb. It is a happiness, then, to be with or near such a Christian. Bernard, having given rules to prepare the heart for prayer, concludes them thus : “ When thy heart is in this frame, then remember me.”

Motive 6. By this *the decayed power of religion will be revived* again among professors, which is the most desirable sight in this world. O that I might live to see that day, when professors shall not walk in a vain show ; when they shall please themselves no more with a name to live, being spiritually dead ; when they shall be no more, as many of them now are, a company of frothy, vain persons, but the majestic beams of holiness, shining from their heavenly and serious conversation, shall awe the world and command reverence from all that are about them ; when they shall warm the hearts of those that come nigh them, so that men shall say, “ God is in these men, of a truth.” Well, such a time may again be expected, according to the promise ; but, till we pursue closer this great work of keeping our hearts, I am out of hopes of seeing those blessed days. I cannot expect better times, till God gives better hearts. Doth it not grieve you to see what a byword religion is made in the world—what ob-

jects of contempt and scorn the professors of it often are ?

Professors, would you recover your credit ; would you again obtain an honorable testimony in the consciences of your very enemies ? then keep your hearts, watch your hearts. It is the looseness, frothiness, and earthliness of your hearts that hath made your lives so ; and this hath brought you under the contempt of the world. You first lose your sight of God and communion with him, then your heavenly and serious deportment among men ; and by that, your interest in their consciences. O then, for the credit of religion, for the honor of your profession, keep your hearts.

Motive 7. By diligence in keeping our hearts, we should prevent and remove the fatal *scandals and stumbling-blocks* out of the way of the world. “Woe to the world,” saith Christ, “because of offences.” Doth not shame cover your faces, do not your hearts bleed within you, to hear of the scandalous miscarriages of many loose professors ? Could you not, like Shem and Japheth, go backward with a garment to cover the shame of many professors ? How is that worthy Name blasphemed, James 2 : 7 ; 2 Sam. 12 : 13, 14 ; how are the hearts of the righteous saddened, Psa. 25 : 3 ; Ezek. 36 : 20 ; how is the world fearfully prejudiced against Christ and religion ; the bonds of death made fast upon their souls ; those that had a general liking to the ways

of God startled and quite driven baek, and thus soul-blood is shed ! “ Woe to the world because of offences.”

Yea, how are consciences of fallen professors plunged, and even overwhelmed in the deeps of trouble ; God inwardly excluding their souls from all comfortable fellowship with himself, and the joys of his salvation. Infinite are the mischiefs that come by the scandalous lives of professors.

And what is the true cause and reason of all this, but the neglecting of the heart ? Were our hearts better kept, all this would be prevented. Had David kept his heart, he had not broken his bones. A negligent and careless heart must of necessity produce a disorderly, scandalous life. I thank God for the freedom and faithfulness of a reverend brother, in showing professors their manifold miscarriages ; and from my heart do wish, that when their wounds have been thoroughly searched by that probe, God would be pleased to heal them by this plaster. O professors, if ever you will keep religion sweet, if ever you hope to recover the credit of it in the world, keep your hearts : either keep your hearts, or lose your credit ; keep your hearts, or lose your comforts ; keep your hearts, lest you shed the blood of souls. What words can express the deep concern, the wonderful consequences of this work ? Every thing puts a necessity, a solemnity, a beauty upon it.

Motive 8. A heart well kept will *fit you for any condition or service* that God hath appointed for you. He that hath learned how to keep his heart lowly, is fit for prosperity ; and he that knows how to use and apply to it scripture promises and supports, is fit to pass through any adversity. He that can deny the pride and selfishness of his heart, is fit to be employed in any service for God. Such a man was Paul : he did not spend his time merely in preaching to others, in keeping others' vineyards ; he looked to himself, and kept his own vineyard, "Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." And what an eminent instrument was he for God ! He could turn his hand to any work, he could dexterously manage both an adverse and a prosperous condition : "I know how to abound, and how to suffer want." Let the people deify him, it moves him not, unless to indignation ; let them stone him, he can bear it. "If a man purge himself from these," saith he, "he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

The heart must first be purged, and then it is prepared for any service of God. When the heart of Iſaiah was purified, which was the thing signified by the touching of his lips with a coal from the altar, then he was fit for God's work : "Here am I, send me." When a man hath not learned to keep

his heart, put him upon any service for God, and if it be attended with honor, it will swell up and overtop his spirit; if with suffering, it will crush and sink him.

Jesus Christ had an instrumental fitness for his Father's work, above all the servants that ever God employed. He was zealous in public work for God; so zealous, that sometimes he forgot to eat bread, yea, that his friends thought he had been beside himself. But yet he so carried on his public work as not to forget his own private communion with God; and therefore you read that when he had been laboring all day, yet, after that, "he went up to a mountain apart to pray; and was there alone." Matt. 14 : 23. O let the keepers of the vineyards look to their own vineyard. We shall never be so instrumental to the good of others, as when we are most diligent about our own souls.

Motive 9. If the people of God would more diligently keep their hearts, *how exceedingly would the communion of saints be thereby sweetened.* How goodly then would be thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Then, as it is prophesied of the Jews, "Men would say, we will go with you; for we have heard that God is among you." It is the fellowship your souls have with the Father and with the Son, that draws out the desires of others after fellowship with you. I tell you, if saints would be persuaded to take more pains, and spend

more time about their hearts, there would quickly be such a divine lustre upon their lives, that men would account it no small privilege to be with or near them. It is the pride, passion, and earthliness of our hearts, that have spoiled Christian fellowship. Whence is it, that when Christians meet they are often jarring and contending, but only from their unmortified passions? Whence are their uncharitable censures of their brethren, but only from self-ignorance? Why are they so rigid and unmerciful towards those that are fallen, but because they consider not themselves, as the apostle speaks, Gal. 6 : 1? Why is their discourse so frothy and unprofitable when they meet, but from the earthliness and vanity of their hearts?

My brethren, these are the things that have so often spoiled Christian fellowship, and made it become a dry and sapless thing, so that many Christians are even weary of it, and are ready to say with the prophet, "O that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them," Jer. 9 : 2; and with David, "My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace." This hath made them long for the grave, that they might go from them that are not their own people to them that are their own people, as the original of that text imports, 2 Cor. 5 : 8.

But now, if Christians would study their own

hearts more, watch and keep them better, all this would be prevented, and the beauty and glory of communion again restored. They would divide no more, contend no more, censure rashly no more: when their hearts are in tune, their thoughts will not jar. How charitable, pitiful, and tender will they be one of another, when every one is daily humbled under the evils of his own heart. Lord, hasten those much-desired days, and bless these counsels in order to them.

Motive 10. By keeping the heart, the comforts of the Spirit and the precious influences of all ordinances would *be fixed, and much longer preserved* in your souls than now they are. Ah, what would I give that my soul might be preserved in that frame I sometimes find it in after an ordinance! “Sometimes, O Lord,” saith one of the fathers, “thou admittest me into the most inward, unusual, and sweet delights—to I know not what sweetness—which, were it perfected in me, I know not what it would be, or rather what it would not become.” But alas, the heart grows careless again, and quickly returns, like water removed from the fire, to its native coldness. Could we but keep those things for ever in our hearts, what Christians should we be, what lives should we live! And how is it that these things remain no longer with us? Doubtless it is because we suffer our hearts to become cold again. We should be as careful after an ordinance

or duty to prevent this, as one that comes out of a hot bath, or great sweat, is of going out into the chill air. We have our hot and cold fits by turns; and what is the reason, but our unskilfulness and carelessness in keeping the heart?

It is a thousand pities that the ordinances of God, as to their quickening and comforting effects, should be like those human ordinances the apostle speaks of, that “perish in the using.” O then let me say to you, as Job, “Do the consolations of God seem small to you?” Look over these ten special benefits, weigh them in a just balance: are they small matters? Is it a small matter to have thy weak understanding assisted, thy endangered soul guarded, thy sincerity cleared, thy communion with God sweetened, thy sails filled in prayer? Is it a small thing to have the decayed power of godliness again revived, all fatal scandals removed, an instrumental fitness to serve Christ obtained, the communion of saints restored to its primitive glory, and the influences of ordinances abiding in the souls of saints? If these are no common blessings, no small benefits, then surely it is a great duty to “keep the heart with all diligence.”

III I now proceed to direct you to some SPECIAL MEANS for the keeping of the heart. And here, besides what hath been hinted in the explication of the duty at the beginning of this discourse, to which

I refer the reader, and all those directions throughout the whole appropriate to particular cases and seasons, I shall further add several other general means, of excellent use to this end.

Means 1. Would you thus keep your hearts as hath been persuaded, then *furnish your hearts richly with the word of God*, which is their best preservative against sin. Keep the word, and the word will keep you. As the receiving of the word first regenerated your hearts, so the keeping of the word within you will preserve your hearts. "Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you." Let it dwell, not tarry with you for a night; and let it dwell richly or plentifully—in all that is of it, in its commands, promises, threats—in all that is in you, in your understanding, memory, conscience, and affections; and then it will preserve your heart. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." It is the slipperiness of our hearts in reference to the word, that causes so many slips in our lives. Conscience cannot be urged or awed with forgotten truth; but keep it in the heart, and it will keep both heart and life upright: "The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide." Or, if he do, the word will recover the straying heart again: "Peter remembered the word of Jesus, and he went out and wept bitterly." We never lose our hearts, till they have first lost the efficacious and powerful impressions of the word.

Means 2. Call your hearts frequently to an account, if ever you mean to keep them with God. Those that put a stock into the hands of unfaithful or suspicious servants, will be sure to make short reckonings with them: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." O it is as necessary as sweet, that we and our reins, that is, we and our secret thoughts should confer together every night. We should call our hearts to account every evening, and say, O my heart, where hast thou been to-day; where have thy thoughts been wandering to-day; what account canst thou give of them? O perverse heart, vain heart, couldst thou not abide by the Fountain of delights? Is there better entertainment with the creature than with God? The oftener the heart meets with rebukes and checks for wandering, the less it will wander. If every vain thought were retracted with a sigh, every excursion of the heart from God with a severe check, it would not dare so boldly and frequently to turn aside. Those actions which are committed with reluctance, are not committed with frequency.

Means 3. He that will keep his heart, must take heed of plunging into such a multiplicity of earthly business as he cannot manage without neglecting his main business. It cannot be imagined he should keep his heart with God, that hath lost himself in a labyrinth of earthly business. Take heed you do not famish your soul by gratifying the immoderate desires of your flesh. I wish many Christians could

truly say, what a heathen once did, "I do not give, but only lend myself to my business." It is said that Germanicus reigned in the hearts of the Romans, Tiberius only in their provinces. Though the world be in your hands, let it not jostle Christ out of your hearts. Take heed, Christian, lest thy shop steal away thy heart from thy closet. God never intended earthly employments for a hinderance, but rather for a help to heavenly ones. O let no Aristippus the heathen arise in judgment against thee, who said he would rather neglect his means than his mind—his farm than his soul. If thy ship be overladen, thou must cast some overboard: more business than thou canst well manage, is like more meat than thou canst well digest; it will quickly make a sickly soul.

Means 4. He that means to keep his heart, must *carefully observe its first declinings from God, and stop it there.* He that will find his house in good repair, must stop every chink as soon as discovered; and he that will keep his heart, must not let a vain thought be long neglected. The serpent of heart-apostasy is best killed in the egg of a small remissness. O, if many backslidden Christians had looked to their hearts in time, they had never come to the sad state they now are in. We may say of heart-neglects as the apostle doth of vain babblings, that they increase to more and more ungodliness. *Nemo repente fit turpissimus*—Little sins neglected will quickly become great and uncontrollable. The

greatest crocodile once lay in an egg, the greatest oak was once but an acorn. The firing of a small train of powder may blow up a whole fort. Men little think what a proud, vain, wanton, or worldly thought may grow to. “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.”

Means 5. Take heed of losing the liveliness and sweetness of your communion with God, lest thereby your hearts be loosed off from God. The heart is a hungry and restless thing; it will have something to feed upon. If it enjoy nothing from God, it will hunt for something among creatures; and there it often loses itself, as well as its end. There is nothing more engages the heart to a constancy and evenness in walking with God, than the sweetness which it tastes therein: as the Gauls, when once they had tasted the sweet wine of Italy, could never be satisfied till they conquered the country where it grew. It is true, conscience of duty may keep the heart from neglecting it; but when there is no higher motive, it drags on lifelessly, and is filled with distractions. That which we delight in we are never weary of; as is evident in the motions of the heart to earthly things, where the wheels run freely, and have often need of checking. The motions of the heart upward would be as free, if its delight in heavenly things were as great.

Means 6. Habituate thy heart to spiritual meditations, if thou wouldst have it freed from those burdensome distractions. By this means you will

get a facility and dexterity in heart-work. It is a pity those smaller portions of our time between solemn duties should lie upon our hands, and be rendered useless to us. To this purpose Boyle remarks, "These parentheses, which happen to come between the more solemn passages of human life, are wont to be lost by most men, for want of a due value of them; and even by good men, for want of skill to preserve them. For though they do not properly despise them, yet they neglect or lose them, for want of knowing how to rescue them, or what to do with them. But although grains of sand and ashes be, apart, but of a despicable smallness, and liable to be scattered and blown away, yet the skilful artificer by a vehement fire brings numbers of those to afford him that noble substance, glass, by whose help we may both see ourselves and our blemishes truly represented, as in looking-glasses; and discern celestial objects, as with telescopes; and with the sunbeams kindle disposed materials, as with burning-glasses. So, when these little fragments or parcels of time, which if not carefully looked to would be dissipated and lost, come to be managed by a skilful contemplator, and to be improved by the celestial fire of devotion, they may be so ordered as to afford us both looking-glasses to dress our souls by, and prospectives to discover heavenly wonders, and incentives to inflame our hearts with zeal." Certainly this is a great advantage for the keeping of the heart with God.

IV. I shall now close the whole with a word or two of CONSOLATION to all diligent and serious Christians that faithfully and closely apply heart-work ; that are groaning and weeping in secret over the hardness, pride, earthliness, and vanity of their hearts ; that are fearing and trembling over their oft-experienced deceitfulness and falseness, while other professors' eyes are abroad, their time and strength eaten up by fruitless disputes and earthly employments, or at best by a cold and formal performance of some heartless and empty duties. Poor Christian, I have three things to offer thee in order to thy support and comfort ; and doubtless either of them alone, mixed with faith, is sufficient to comfort thee under all the trouble thou hast with thine own heart.

Comfort 1. *This argues thy heart to be upright and honest,* whatever thy gifts and abilities are. It is uprightness of heart will comfort thee upon a death-bed. “Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which was good in thy sight.” 2 Kings, 20 : 2, 3. I am really of his mind who said, “Might I have my wish, I would prefer the most despicable and sordid work of a rustic Christian, before all the victories and triumphs of Alexander or Cæsar ;” yea, let me add, before all the elaborated duties and excellent gifts of vain professors, before the tongues of

men and angels. It will signify more to my comfort to spend one solitary hour in mourning before the Lord over heart-corruption, than many hours in a seeming zealous, but really dead performance of common duties, with the greatest enlargements and richest embellishments of parts and gifts.

By this very thing Christ distinguishes the formal from the serious Christian. Matt. 6 : 5. The one is for the street and synagogue, for the observation and applause of men, but the other is a closet-man ; he drives on a home trade, a heart trade. Never be troubled, then, for the want of those things that a man may have, and be eternally damned ; but rather bless God for that which none but the favorites and darlings of heaven have. Many a one is now in hell that had a better head than thine, and many a one now in heaven that complained of as bad a heart as thine.

Comfort 2. Know further for thy comfort, that God would never leave thee under so many heart-troubles and burdens, if he intended not thy *real benefit* thereby. Thou art often crying out, Lord, why is it thus ; why go I mourning all the day, having sorrow in my heart ? Thus long have I been exercised with hardness of heart, and to this day have not obtained a broken heart. Many years have I been praying and striving against vain thoughts, yet am still infested and perplexed with them. O when shall I get a better heart ? I have obtained no deliverance, neither have the corruptions of my

heart fallen. I have brought this heart many times to prayers, sermons, and sacraments, expecting and hoping for a cure from them, and still my sore runneth and ceaseth not.

Troubled soul, let this comfort thee: thy God designs thy benefit, even by these occasions of thy sad complaints. For, 1. Hereby he would let thee see what thy heart by nature was and is, and therein take notice how much thou art beholden to free grace. He leaves thee under these exercises of spirit, that thou mayest lie as with thy face upon the ground, admiring that ever the Lord of glory should take so vile a creature into his bosom. Thy base heart, if it be good for nothing else, yet serves to commend and set off the unsearchable riches of free grace. 2. This serves to beat thee off continually from resting, yea, or but glancing upon thine own righteousness or excellency. The corruption of thy heart, working in all thy duties, makes thee sensibly feel that the bed is too short, and the covering too narrow. Were it not for those reflections thou hast after duties, upon the dulness and distractions of thine heart in them, how apt wouldst thou be to fall in love with, and admire thine own performances and enlargements; for if, notwithstanding these, thou hast much to do with the pride of thy heart, how much more, if such humbling and self-abasing considerations were wanting. And 3. This tends to make thee more compassionate and tender towards others. Perhaps thou wouldst have

little pity for the distresses and soul-troubles of others, if thou hadst less experience of thine own.

Comfort 3. God will shortly put *a blessed end* to all these troubles, cares, and watchings. The time is coming when thy heart shall be as thou wouldst have it; when thou shalt be discharged of these cares, fears, and sorrows, and never cry out, Oh, my hard, my proud, my vain, earthly heart, any more; when all darkness shall be banished from thine understanding, and thou shalt clearly discover all truths in God, that crystal ocean of truth; when all vanity shall be purged perfectly out of thy thoughts, and they be everlastingly, ravishingly, and delightfully entertained and exercised upon that supreme goodness and infinite excellency of God, from whom they shall never wander any more. And as for thy pride, passion, earthliness, and all the other matters of thy complaint and trouble, it shall be said of them as of the Egyptians to Israel, "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." These corruptions thou seest to-day, henceforth thou shalt see them no more for ever; when thou shalt lay down thy weapons of prayers, tears, and groans, and put on the armor of light, not to fight, but to triumph in.

Lord, when shall this blessed day come? How long? how long? Holy and True! My soul waiteth for thee. "Come, my Beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether." Amen.





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